WITCHCRAFT IN SALEM VILLAGE

JOHN FISKE

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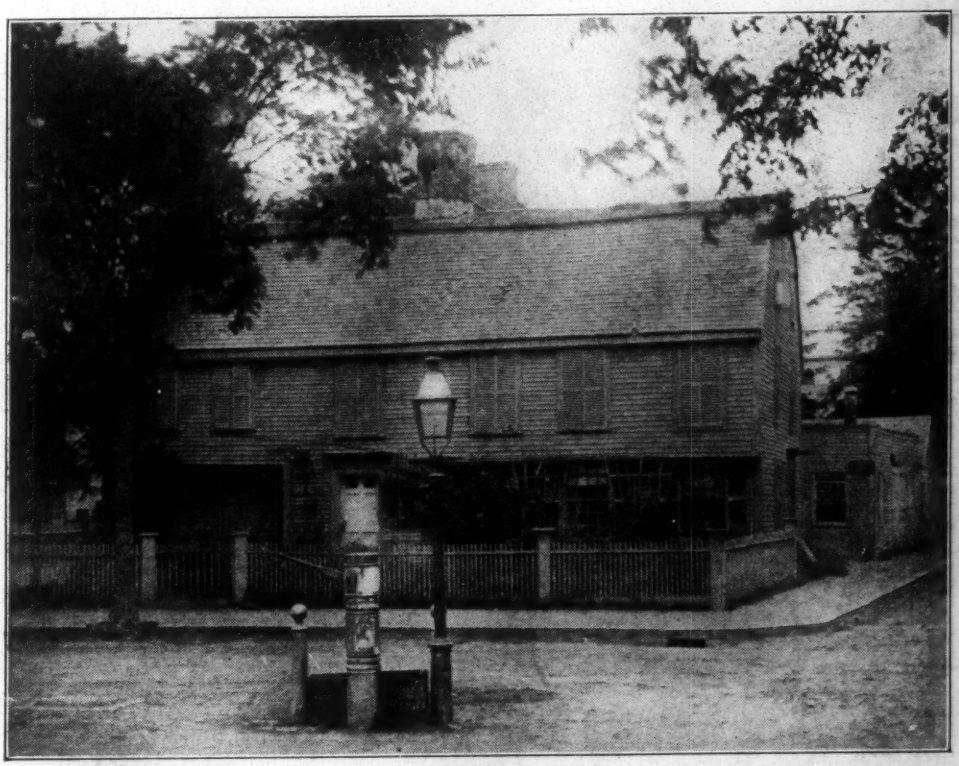

Souvenir Edition

WITCHCRAFT IN SALEM VILLAGE

BY

JOHN FISKE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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Prof. R. C. Cabot,
Cambridge.

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NOTE

THIS account of the remarkable witchcraft delusion and the witch trials in Salem is reprinted from the author's *New France and New England.*

WITCHCRAFT IN SALEM VILLAGE

In the year 1670 the provincial parliament of Normandy condemned a dozen women, young and old, to be burned at the stake. Their crime was attendance upon the Witches' Sabbath. An appeal was taken to the Crown, and Louis XIV. was persuaded to spare their lives on condition that they should leave the kingdom and never return. Astonishment and indignation greeted this exercise of royal clemency, and the provincial parliament sent a petition to the king containing a grave remonstrance: "Your parliament have thought it their duty on occasion of these crimes, the greatest which men can commit, to make you acquainted with the general and uniform feeling of the people of this province with regard to them; it being moreover a question in which are concerned the glory of God and the relief of your suffering subjects, who groan under their fears from the threats and menaces of this sort of persons. . . . We humbly supplicate your Majesty to reflect once more upon the extraordinary results which proceed from the malevolence of these people; on the loss of goods and chattels, and the deaths from unknown diseases, which are often the consequence of their menaces; . . . all of which may easily be proved to your Majesty's satisfaction by the records of various trials before your parliaments." It is pleasant to be able to add that Louis XIV. was too well versed in the professional etiquette of royalty to withdraw a pardon which he had once granted, and so the poor women were saved

Louis XIV. commutes the sentence of death imposed upon alleged witches

The parliament of Normandy protests

from the flames. What we have especially to note is that the highest court of Normandy, representing the best legal

LOUIS XIV

knowledge of that province, in defining witchcraft as the infliction of disease or the destruction of property by unknown and mysterious means, describes it as the greatest of all crimes, and has no more doubt of its reality than of burglary or highway robbery.[1]

[1] [For the original text and further particulars in regard to this petition Lecky refers to Garinet, *Histoire de la Magie en France*, p. 337. Cf. also Rambaud, *Hist. de la Civilisation Française*, ii. 154. "In 1672, Colbert directed the magistrates to receive no accusations of sorcery." Lecky, *Hist. of Rationalism*, i. 118.]

This unquestioning belief in the reality of witchcraft has been shared by the whole human race, civilized and uncivilized alike, from prehistoric ages to the end of the seventeenth century.[1] There are tribes of men with minds so little developed that travellers have doubted the existence of religious ideas among them; but none have been found so low as not to have some notion of witchcraft. Indeed, one of the most primitive and fundamental shapes which the relation of cause and effect takes in the savage mind is the assumed connection between disease or death and some malevolent personal agency. The conceptions of natural disease and natural death are attainable only by civilized minds. To the savage, who has scarcely an inkling of such a thing as laws of nature, all death is regarded as murder, either at the hands of a superhuman power that must be propitiated, or at the hands of some human being upon whom vengeance may be wreaked. The inter-

The belief in witchcraft universal

[1] [For a comprehensive survey of the history of witchcraft and allied occult phenomena, from the standpoint of modern psychology, see Alfr. Lehman, *Aberglaube und Zauberei*, Stuttgart, 1898. Mr. Lecky's opening chapter on Magic and Witchcraft, in his *History of Rationalism*, still remains for the English reader the most convenient sketch of witchcraft in modern times. On the rise of modern witchcraft, the most scholarly investigation in English is that of H. C. Lea, in his *Inquisition in the Middle Ages*, vol. iii. chaps. vi. and vii.

Recently there has appeared an investigation into the beginnings of the witchcraft delusion that surpasses all previous works in scientific thoroughness. It is Joseph Hansen's *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Hexenwahns und der Hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter*, Bonn, 1901. Hansen has presented his results in popular form in his *Zauberwahn, Inquisition und die Entstehung der Grossen Hexenverfolgung*, Munich, 1901. In the *Report of the American Hist. Assoc.* for 1890 will be found an admirably compact and learned sketch of "The Literature of Witchcraft," by Professor George L. Burr. An excellent selection of extracts illustrating the belief in witchcraft, the methods of trial, and the growth of the opposition is given in Professor Burr's *The Witch-Persecutions*, a pamphlet published by the University of Pennsylvania.]

pretation of disease is the same, and hence one of the chief occupations of medicine-men and priests among barbarous races is the detection and punishment of witches.[1] Hence among all the superstitions, — or things that have "stood over" from primeval ages, — the belief in witchcraft has been the most deeply rooted and the most tenacious of life. In all times and places, until quite lately among the most advanced communities, the reality of witchcraft has been accepted without question, and scarcely any human belief is supported by so vast a quantity of recorded testimony.

Vitality of the belief

At the present day, among communities like our own, we may observe a wonderful change. Among educated people the belief in witchcraft is practically extinct. It has not simply ceased to be taken seriously, but it has vanished from people's minds. We recognize it as one of the grotesque features in an Indian's theory of things, or perhaps we find it cropping out among the odds and ends of diabolism that the negro mind retains from the old stock of African folk-lore, but we no longer associate such a belief with civilized men, and a good deal of historical study is needed to enable us to realize adequately its omnipresence only two centuries ago.

What has caused this remarkable change in our mental attitude toward witchcraft? Surely not argument. Nobody has ever refuted the evidence that once seemed so conclusive in favour of the belief. For the most part we should now regard that evidence as not worth the trouble of refuting. Some powerful cause has made our minds insuperably inhospitable to such sort of evidence. That cause is the gigantic development of physical

Cause of the final decay of the belief

[1] [On the stubborn resistance made in modern times to the displacement of the Satanic theory of disease and disaster by scientific theories, see A. D. White, *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology* chaps. xi.–xvi.]

A

TRYAL

OF

WITCHES,

AT THE

ASSIZES

HELD AT

Bury St. Edmonds for the County of *SUFFOLK*; on the Tenth day of *March*, 1664.

BEFORE

Sir MATTHEW HALE Kt.

THEN

Lord Chief Baron of His Majesties Court of EXCHEQUER.

Taken by a Person then Attending the Court

LONDON,
Printed for *William Shrewsbery* at the Bible in *Duck-Lane*. 1682.

TITLE OF "A TRYAL OF WITCHES"

science since the days of Newton and Descartes. The minds of civilized people have become familiar with the conception of natural law, and that conception has simply stifled the old superstition as clover chokes out weeds. It has been observed that the existence of evidence in favour of witchcraft closely depends upon the disposition to believe it, so that when the latter ceases the former disappears. Accordingly we find no difficulty in understanding the universality of the belief until quite modern times. The disposition to believe was one of the oldest inheritances of the human mind, while the capacity for estimating evidence in cases of physical causation is one of its very latest and most laborious acquisitions.

Rise of physical science

In 1664 there was a witch trial at Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk. The presiding justice was Sir Matthew Hale, one of the most eminent and learned of English judges. Two aged widows, Amy Duny and Rose Cullender, were indicted for bewitching six young girls and one baby boy. This infant was seized with fainting turns, and his mother, suspecting witchcraft, took counsel of a country doctor, who told her to hang the child's crib blanket all day in the chimney corner, and if on taking it down at nightfall she should see anything strange there, she was not to be afraid of it, but to throw it into the fire. Well, when she was putting the baby to bed she took down the blanket, and a big toad fell out and hopped about the hearth. "Oh, put it in the fire, quick," said she to a boy present, who forthwith seized the poor toad with a pair of tongs and held it in the blaze. There was a flashing as of powder, and a strange noise, and then the toad vanished; but that same evening Amy Duny sitting by her own fireside had her face all smirched and scorched. Of course Amy was the toad, and it was natural that she should be vexed at such treatment, so that when the baby's sister suddenly sickened and died, and its mother grew lame

An English witch trial before Sir Matthew Hale

Grotesque evidence

enough to use crutches, it was all clearly due to Amy's diabolical arts. Absolute demonstration was reached when

Matthew Hale

Amy was sentenced to death, for then her witch-power ceased, and the lame woman forthwith threw away her crutches and walked as briskly as anybody.

The other afflicted children complained of griping pains, and vomited crooked pins and twopenny nails. In the court-room when Amy Duny or Rose Cullender came near to them, they threw their aprons over their heads and writhed in

agony. It happened that among the magistrates present were some hard-headed Sadducees. Lord Cornwallis and Sir Edmund Bacon suspected these fits and torments of being a wicked sham. They blindfolded the girls, and had other old women approach and touch them. The girls went off into fits every time without discriminating between Rose or Amy and the other women. But this trifling flaw in the case was nothing when set off against the weighty evidence of a witness who declared that Rose Cullender had given him hard words, and shortly afterwards his hay-cart was stuck in passing through a gate. Another deposed that Amy Duny had said, "That chimney of yours will be falling down one of these days," and so sure enough it did. After this there could be no doubt in any reasonable mind that Rose had bewitched the cart and Amy the chimney. The learned justice in his charge aimed a rebuke at the scepticism exhibited by some of the magistrates; he declared that the reality of witchcraft was not open to question, since it was expressly affirmed in Holy Writ, and provided for in the criminal codes of all nations. The jury took less than half an hour to agree upon their verdict of guilty; and next week the two old dames were hanged at Cambridge, protesting their innocence with their last breath.[1]

Indications of shamming ignored

Sir Matthew Hale affirms the reality of witchcraft

Upon just such so-called "evidence" more thousands of innocent persons than it will ever be possible to enumerate have been put to death under the forms of law. It is difficult to accept all the wholesale figures mentioned by old historians, yet the figures for which we have good authority are sufficiently dreadful. In general we may regard it as probable that during the Middle Ages executions for witchcraft occurred with much the same monotonous regularity as exe-

[1] Linton's *Witch Stories*, p. 395. [Cotton Mather printed an account of this trial in his *Wonders of the Invisible World*, London reprint, 1862, pp. 111–120. He says it "was a Tryal much considered by the Judges of New England." Ibid. p. 111.]

cutions for murder and other felonies, but from time to time there were epidemics of terror when the number of victims was fearfully swelled. Now the famous bull of Pope Innocent VIII. against witchcraft, published in 1484, marks the beginning of a new era in the history of the superstition.[1] As literature and art have had their Golden Ages, so the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were especially the Sulphurous Age of the witchcraft delusion. It was the period when the Church of Rome was engaged in a life and death struggle with heresy, and obnoxious persons suspected of heresy could sometimes be destroyed by a charge of witchcraft when there was no other method of reaching them. Thus the universal superstition was enlisted in the service of a militant and unscrupulous ecclesiastical organization with effects that were frightful. As it was understood that the diabolical crime of witchcraft was now to be stamped out once for all, the evidences of it were naturally found in plenty. The "Malleus Maleficarum," or Hammer of Witches,[2] published in 1489, became the great text-book of the subject, and at no time since history began have the fires of hell been so often lighted upon earth as in the course of the next two centuries.

Revival of witchcraft superstition

The Hammer of Witches

We are told by Martin del Rio that in 1515 not less than 500 witches were executed in the single city of Geneva; and a certain inquisitor named Remigio boasted that in his district, in the north of Italy, within fifteen years he had personally superintended the burning of more than 900 such criminals.[3] In Scotland, from 1560 to 1600, the average annual

[1] [This bull is given in an English translation by Burr, *The Witch-Persecutions*, pp. 7–10.]

[2] [An extract from this book is given by Burr, *The Witch-Persecutions*, and an analysis of it in Roskoff's *Geschichte des Teufels*, ii. 226–292. Cf. also Hansen, as above.]

[3] [Williams, *The Superstitions of Witchcraft*, p. 107. See also White, *Warfare of Science and Theology*, i. 358, 359.]

number of victims was 200, making a grim and ghastly total of 8000 for the forty years. Or, to put it in another form, the executions averaged four each week in a population about equal to that of Massachusetts at the present day. In 1597 that grotesque royal author, James VI., published at Edinburgh his treatise on "Dæmonologie," in which he maintained that against so foul a crime as witchcraft any sort of evidence is good enough, and the testimony of very young children, or of persons of the vilest character, ought on no account to be omitted. In the course of our story we shall see that James was by no means singular in this absurd style of reasoning. In 1604, scarcely more than a year after he had become King of England, Parliament passed the famous "Witch Act," which remained on the statute-book until the reign of George II.

King James on the reality of witchcraft

It was in the reign of Charles I. that trials and executions under the Witch Act were most frequent. While the Long Parliament was in session the affair attained almost the proportions of an epidemic, but under the rule of Cromwell there was a sudden halt, and thereafter the delusion never fully recovered its hold upon the community. Cases like those of Amy Duny and Rose Cullender were sporadic. In that age of Newton and Locke, the whole baleful troop of demons were spreading their wings for their final flight from this world.

The delusion increases with the rise of the Puritan party to power

The last executions for witchcraft, however, occurred in England in 1712 and in Scotland in 1722.[1] We may observe in passing that in Germany the case of Maria Renata, a nun beheaded for witchcraft, occurred as late as 1749, the year in which Goethe was born.[2]

Last executions for witchcraft

[1] [Cf. Lecky, i. 139.]

[2] [On this case see White, *Warfare of Science*, ii. 121 and 156. He refers in particular to an essay on Maria (or Anna) Renata by Johannes Scherr in his *Hammerschläge und Historien*.]

Considering the fact that the exodus of Puritans to New England occurred during the reign of Charles I., while the prosecutions for witchcraft were increasing toward a maximum in the mother country, it is rather strange that so few cases occurred in the New World. It was already noted in Cromwell's time that Independency in ecclesiastical matters seemed to be attended by a diminution of activity in the world of witches, but on the other hand the Independents who came over to New England voluntarily thrust themselves into a country which was supposed to be in a special sense under the direct control and administration of the Devil. It was believed that Pagan countries generally were ruled by Satan, and that here in the American wilderness that old foe of mankind had taken his stand to annoy and dishearten the Lord's elect. As for the red men, it was easy to see that they were his veritable imps; their tricks and manners proclaimed them as such. There could be little doubt that the heathen New World was Satan's Kingdom;[1] and in view of this very common belief it is strange that the instances of witchcraft or diabolism were so rare in the early history of New England.

Primitive America regarded as a domain of the Devil

During the sixty years following the first settlement of Boston, a dozen or more cases can be enumerated. The first victim in the New World was Margaret Jones of Charlestown, who had some sensible ideas about medicine. She disapproved of wholesale bleeding and violent emetics, and used to work cures by means of herb tonics and other simple prescriptions. This offended the doctors, and in 1648 the poor woman was tried for witchcraft, convicted, and hanged. Governor Winthrop, who tells the story, adds that at the very hour of her execution there was a great gale in Connecticut, which blew down trees, and this he considers an absolute demonstration

The first victim of the witchcraft delusion in New England

[1] [See Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, London, 1693, London reprint, 1862, p. 74.]

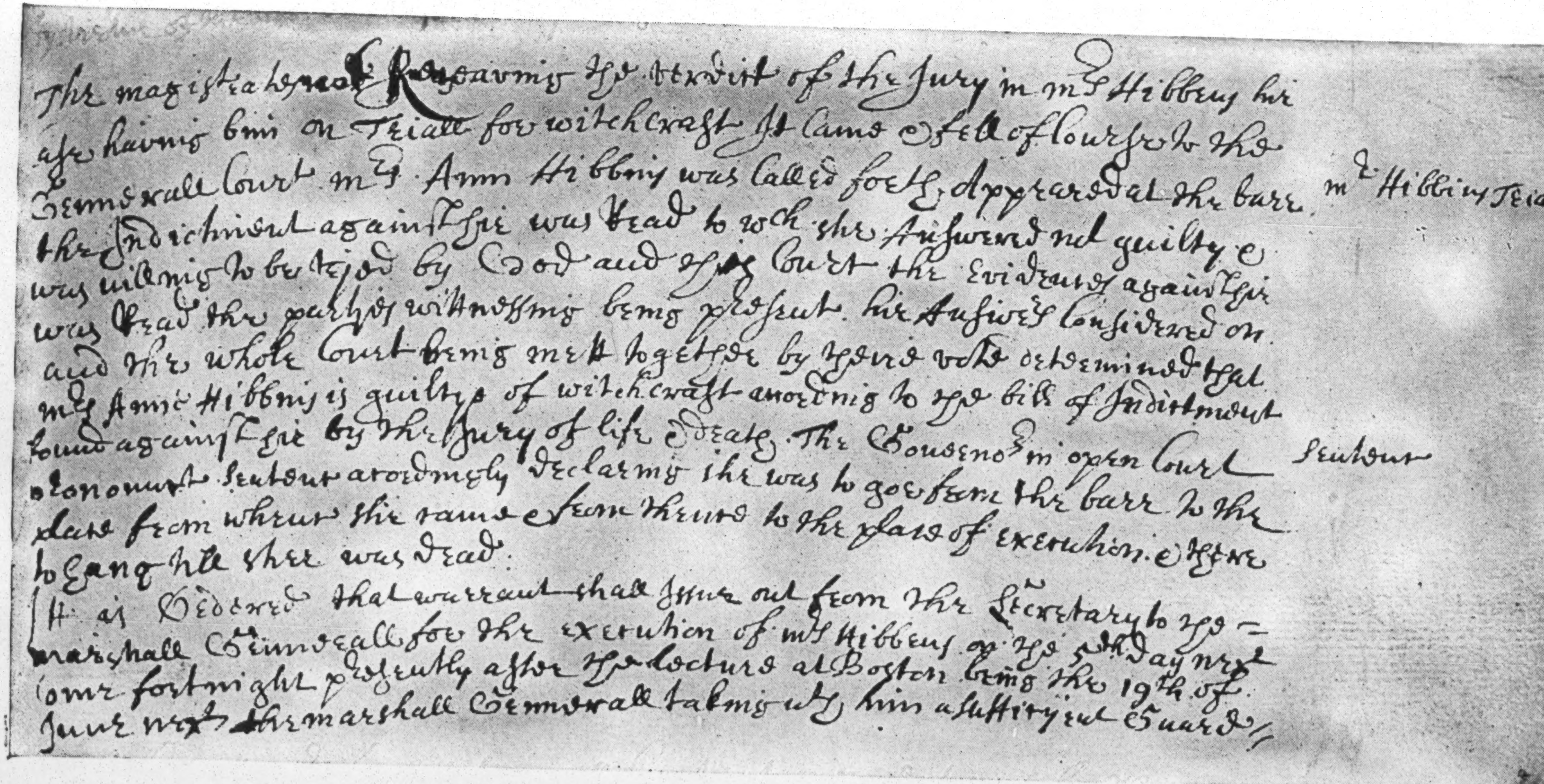
of her guilt.[1] When Winthrop wrote this, Isaac Newton was a child playing in the nursery. When we see a mind so broad and cultivated as Winthrop's entertaining such notions of cause and effect, is it not obvious that the mainstay and support of the frightful superstition was ignorance of physical science?

About the same time, according to Thomas Hutchinson, a woman was hanged at Dorchester, and another at Cambridge, for the crime of witchcraft. The next case was a startling one, on account of the victim's social position. A woman like Margaret Jones, though perhaps educated, and such as would to-day be classed as a lady, was in those times not called Mrs. Jones, but simply Goodwife or Goody Jones. To be Mrs., or Mistress, one must be the wife of an esquire, and the rank of esquire was as carefully guarded in common forms of speech as the rank of knight or baronet. The next victim of the witch-delusion was Mistress Ann Hibbins. Her husband, William Hibbins, who died in 1654, had been for twelve years a member of the council of assistants, and at one time was the colony's diplomatic agent in England. Her brother, Richard Bellingham, was deputy-governor of Massachusetts. In 1656 this lady was tried for witchcraft before Governor Endicott and the General Court. She was found guilty, and was hanged on Boston Common on the 19th of June of that year. The verdict and death-warrant are in the Colonial Records,[2] but we have no report of the case, and do not know how the accusation was originated. Hutchinson, whose great-grandfather Edward was one of the lady's friends, believed it to be a case of outrageous persecution, and so some of her contemporaries regarded it. The Rev. John Norton, persecutor of

The case of Mrs. Hibbins

[1] [See Winthrop, ii. 326 (rev. ed., ii. 397); W. F. Poole, *No. Am. Rev.*, April, 1869, pp. 343, 344.]

[2] [*Mass. Records*, iv. pt. i. 269. The record is quoted in Winsor's *Memorial Hist. of Boston*, ii. 139.]


The magistrates not Consenting to the verdict of the Jury in Mrs Hibbens her case having been on Triall for witchcraft It came of Course to the Generall Court Mrs Ann Hibbins was called forth appeared at the barre the Indictment against her was read to wch she Answered not guilty & was willing to be tryed by God and this Court the Evidences against her was read the partyes wittnessing being present her Answers Considered on and the whole Court being mett together by their vote determined that Mrs Anne Hibbins is guilty of witchcraft according to the bill of Inditement found against her by the Jury of life & death The Governor in open Court pronounct sentence accordingly declaring she was to goe from the barr to the place from whence she came & from thence to the place of execution & there to hang till shee was dead. — Mrs Hibbins Triall — Sentence

It is Ordered that warrant shall issue out from the Secretary to the marshall Generall for the execution of Mrs Hibbens on the 5th day next come fortnight presently after the lecture at Boston being the 19th of June next the marshall Generall taking with him a sufficient Guard.

FACSIMILE OF VERDICT AND DEATH-WARRANT OF ANN HIBBINS, MAY, 1656

Quakers, was by temperament quick to see marks of Satan's presence, but he tried his best to save Mrs. Hibbins, and afterward spoke of her accusers with his customary sarcasm. Mrs. Hibbins was hanged, he said, "only for having more wit than her neighbours."[1] One day she saw two persons whom she knew to be unfriendly to her talking together in the street, whereupon she exclaimed that she knew they were talking about her. Her guess being correct was forthwith cited against her as an instance of supernatural insight which must have been imparted to her by the Devil. According to Norton this argument had great weight with the court. It is a pity, and it is strange too, that we know so little of this case, for there must have been something extraordinary in the circumstances that could thus send to the gallows one of the foremost persons in that colonial society. There is evidence that the affair created fierce excitement and left much bitterness behind. There were many in Boston who insisted that a saint had been wickedly done to death by slanderous tongues.

A victim of malice acting through superstition

John Norton

Out of a dozen cases in the course of the next thirty years we find several acquittals, and once in a while we encounter a gleam of genuine common sense, as in the case of John Bradstreet of Rowley, who was accused of familiarity with the Devil; forasmuch as the said Bradstreet confessed that he had "read in a book of magic, and that he heard a voice asking him what work he had for him. He answered, 'Go make a bridge of sand over the sea; go make a ladder of sand up to heaven, and go to God, and come down no more.'" When the case was tried at Ipswich, the jury found that the said Bradstreet lied, whereupon the court sentenced him to pay twenty shillings fine or else to be whipped.[2]

A sensible jury

[1] [Hutchinson's *Hist. of Mass.*, i. 173.]

[2] [Nevins, *Witchcraft in Salem Village*, p. 34. This case occurred in 1652.]

More disastrous was the case of the Goodwin children in Boston in 1688. An Irish Catholic woman named Glover was laundress for John Goodwin's family, in which there were four children. One day the eldest child, Martha, aged thirteen, accused the Glover woman of purloining some pieces of linen. Glover answered with threats and curses, and Martha presently fell down in a fit. The other children — aged eleven, seven, and five — soon followed her example. Then they went through with all sorts of pranks: they would pretend to be deaf and dumb; they would complain of being pricked with pins or cut with knives; they would bark like dogs and purr like cats; they even performed feats of what modern spirit-rappers call "levitation," skimming over the ground without appearing to touch it, seeming, as Cotton Mather said, to "fly like geese." This sort of thing went on for several weeks. Doctors and ministers agreed that the children must have been bewitched by the Glover woman, and she was accordingly hanged.

The Goodwin children

The chief interest in this case arises from Cotton Mather's connection with it. That famous divine, son of Increase Mather and grandson of John Cotton, was then five and twenty years of age. He had been graduated at Harvard ten years before, his career as an author had already begun, and he was already regarded as the most learned man of his time. The range of his reading was enormous. Theology, philosophy, history, literature, physical science, in all these he was omnivorous, and he could write and speak at least seven languages (one of them the Iroquois) with fluency and precision.[1] In the course of his life he published nearly four hundred books and tracts, most of which bring a high price now, while some are indispensable to the student of history. He was an earnest and severely conscientious man. His chief foible was vanity, which was

Cotton Mather

His character

[1] [Samuel Mather, *Life of Cotton Mather*, p. 49.]

perhaps not strange in view of the wholesale homage and adulation to which he was accustomed. He was not a profound or original thinker, nor was he free from the errors and superstitions characteristic of his time; but in most matters his face was set toward the future and his work was helpful to mankind. In 1721, in spite of furious opposition and some personal peril, he succeeded in introducing into America inoculation for smallpox,[1] the most conspicuous among many instances in which he showed himself wiser than his contemporaries. With his other fine qualities he was a man of loving heart and gracious sympathies. But in the disputes and conflicts of his time he took too prominent a part to get along without making enemies; and so it happened that after the witchcraft delusion had become thoroughly discredited, a malicious writer saw fit to distort and misrepresent his relations to it. The slanders of Robert Calef became the commonplaces of historical writers in a later generation, and the memory of Cotton Mather has been held up to scorn as that of the man who did more than any one else to stimulate and foster the witchcraft delusion in Massachusetts. This view is maintained by Charles Wentworth Upham, in his history of "Salem Witchcraft," published in 1867 in two volumes, the most learned and elaborate work on the subject.[2] It was repeated at second hand from older writers and embellished with cheap rhetoric by George Bancroft, and has usually been copied by the makers of compendiums and school-books, so that it has obtained a firm lodgment in the popular mind. The correct view of Cotton Mather's relations to witchcraft was first set forth in

His courage in advocating inoculation

Views of Calef and Upham

[1] [See Peabody's *Life of Cotton Mather*, pp. 311–326.]

[2] [For the literature of this subject, see G. H. Moore, *Bibliographical Notes on Witchcraft in Massachusetts*, Worcester, 1888, and Justin Winsor, "The Literature of Witchcraft in New England," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Soc.*, 1895.]

Longfellow's "New England Tragedies," published in 1868. The poet had studied the original documents with profound attention, and his fine critical insight had detected the truth when Upham, the Dryasdust specialist, had missed it. But the first full and adequate statement of the case was made in 1869 by the late William Frederick Poole, who was at that time librarian of the Boston Athenæum.[1] Cultivation of the critical faculty and the exercise of it upon original sources of information are perpetually obliging us to modify, and sometimes to reverse, long-accepted judgments upon historical characters and events. In the present brief narrative I shall simply indicate, without controversy, the true position of Cotton Mather.

Mr. W. F. Poole

His connection with the Goodwin case began late. He was the last minister invited to attend. He had nothing to do with the accusation or prosecution of the poor laundress, but after her death sentence he visited her twice in prison to pray for her. She confessed to him that she had made a covenant with Satan, and was in the habit of going to meetings at which that personage was present. She was utterly impenitent and wanted none of his prayers. "However," as he says so sweetly in his account of the matter, "against her will I prayed with her, which, if it were a fault, it was in excess of pity." In her confession she implicated several other persons by name, but Mather never divulged any of these names, for, as he said, "we should be very tender in such relation, lest we wrong the reputation of the innocent by stories not enough inquired into." About the time of this woman's execution Mather took the little accuser, Martha Goodwin, into his own home and kept her there for several months, partly as a subject for investigation, partly as a patient to be cured by prayer and judicious

Cotton Mather and the Goodwin case

[1] [Mr. Poole's paper was published in the *No. Am. Review* in April, 1869. Mr. Upham replied to it in *The Historical Magazine* in September, 1869.]

treatment,[1] for this brilliant young clergyman was also a doctor in medicine of no mean attainments, besides knowing more law, and knowing it to better purpose, than half the jurists of his time. The girl showed herself an actress of elf-like precocity and shrewdness. She wished to prove that she was bewitched, and she seems to have known Mather's prejudices against Quakers, Papists, and the Church of England; for she could read Quaker books and Catholic books fluently, and seemed quite in love with the Book of Common Prayer, but she could not read a word in the Bible or any book of Puritan theology, and even in her favourite Prayer Book, whenever she came to the Lord's Prayer she faltered and failed. Gradually the young minister's firm good sense and kindness prevailed in calming her and making her discard such nonsense, but during the cure her symptoms showed the actress. She would refuse to go into the study, lined with its goodly tomes of Greek and Hebrew, because her devils forbade it; then she would go into hysterics of six-young-lady-power until it occurred to some one of the family to drag her, all screams and kicks, into the sacred room; then she would instantly grow quiet and say that the accursed thing had just gone from her in the form of a mouse, — which was of course a bit of ancient Teutonic folk-lore, a remnant of the doctrine of changelings, implicitly believed by our ancestors when they lived in what Freeman used to call Oldest England, before ever Hengist and Horsa sailed for Kent. After a while the little minx was cured; her distemper gave way to kind patience and common sense, and the affair went no farther.

Cotton Mather and the Goodwin girl

Tests of bewitchment

Cotton Mather was a firm believer in the reality of witch-

[1] ["I took her home to my own family, partly out of compassion to her parents, but chiefly that I might be a critical eye-witness of things that would enable me to confute the *Sadducism* of this debauch'd age." Mather's *Magnalia*, ii. 460 (Hartford ed., 1853). The *Magnalia* was first published in 1700.]

MEMORABLE PROVIDENCES,

Relating to

WITCHCRAFTS

And POSSESSIONS.

A Faithful Account of many Wonderful and Surprising Things, that have befallen ſeveral *Bewitched* and *Poſſeſſed* Perſons in *New-England*.

Particularly, A NARRATIVE of the marvellous *Trouble* and *Releef* Experienced by a pious Family in *Boſton*, very lately and ſadly moleſted with EVIL SPIRITS.

Whereunto is added,

A Diſcourſe delivered unto a Congregation in *Boſton*, on the Occaſion of that *Illuſtrious Providence*.

As alſo

A Diſcourſe delivered unto the ſame Congregation, on the occaſion of an horrible *Self-Murder* Committed in the Town.

With an *Appendix*, in vindication of a Chapter in a late Book of Remarkable Providences, from the Calumnies of a Quaker at *Penſilvania*.

Written By Cotton Mather, *Miniſter of the Goſpel.*

And Recommended by the Miniſters of *Boſton* and *Charleſton*

Printed at *Boſton* in *N. England* by *R. P.* 1689.
Sold by *Joſeph Brunning*, at his Shop at the Corner of the *Priſon-Lane* next the *Exchange*.

TITLE OF COTTON MATHER'S "MEMORABLE PROVIDENCES"

craft. He published an account of this case and its cure.[1] His object in the publication was twofold: first, to prove the reality of witchcraft against a few bold sceptics who were lately beginning to doubt it, in spite of the teachings of Holy Writ; secondly, to show the best method of effecting a cure. In this second point he was in advance of his age, and had others been as discreet and self-contained as he, there need have been no such tragedy as was soon to be enacted in Salem. All personal and local references, whatever could give the mania a concrete hold and a chance to work bodily mischief, he had kept, and ever after kept, locked up within his own breast. He had evidence enough, perhaps, to have hung half the old women in Boston, but his strong common sense taught him that the Devil is too tricksome a rascal to be worthy of much credit as an accuser. His rules of evidence were far in advance of those upon which the great lawyer, Sir Matthew Hale, had condemned people to death only four and twenty years before. Mather's rules would not have allowed a verdict of guilty simply upon the drivelling testimony of the afflicted persons; and if this wholesome caution had been observed, not a witch would ever have been hung at Salem.

Mather publishes an account of this case

Some writers have thought that the mere publication of Mather's book must have led to the outbreak of the delusion in Salem, since it must have helped put such ideas into the heads of Salem people. But this is forgetting that the superstitious ideas were in everybody's head already. Not a man, woman, or child in Massachusetts, or elsewhere in the civilized world, but knew exactly how a witch should behave. Tracts and chap-books on the wretched subject abounded, and poisoned

Cotton Mather's book and the Salem troubles

[1] [Mather's account of this case was included in his *Memorable Providences, relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions*, etc., Boston, 1689. Reprinted in London in 1691 as *Late Memorable Providences*, etc. He also gave a full account in his *Magnalia*, Hartford ed., ii. 456–465.]

young minds as dime novels do in our time. Even if Mather had written nothing, the execution of the Irish laundress and the pranks of her little accusers were familiar topics at every fireside in New England.

But in 1692, quite apart from any personal influence, there were circumstances which favoured the outbreak of an epidemic of witchcraft. In this ancient domain of Satan there were indications that Satan was beginning again to claim his own. War had broken out with that Papist champion, Louis XIV., and it had so far been going badly with God's people in America. The shrieks of the victims at Schenectady and Salmon Falls and Fort Loyal still made men's blood run cold in their veins; and the great expedition against Quebec had come home crestfallen with defeat. Evidently the Devil was bestirring himself; it was a witching time; the fuel for an explosion was laid, and it needed but a spark to fire it.

Gloomy outlook in 1692

That spark was provided by servants and children in the household of Samuel Parris, minister of the church at Salem Village, a group of outlying farms from three to five miles out from the town of Salem. The place was sometimes called Salem Farms, and in later times was set off as a separate township under the name of Danvers. Any one who has ever visited a small New England village can form some idea of the looks of the place, for the type is strongly characteristic, and from the days of Cotton Mather to the introduction of railroads the changes were not great. On almost any country roadside in Massachusetts you may see to-day just such wooden houses as that in which Samuel Parris dwelt. This clergyman seems to have lived for some years in the West Indies, engaged in commercial pursuits, before he turned his attention to theology. Some special mercantile connection between Salem and Barbadoes seems to have brought him to Salem Village, where he was installed as pastor in 1689. An entry in the church records,

Salem Village

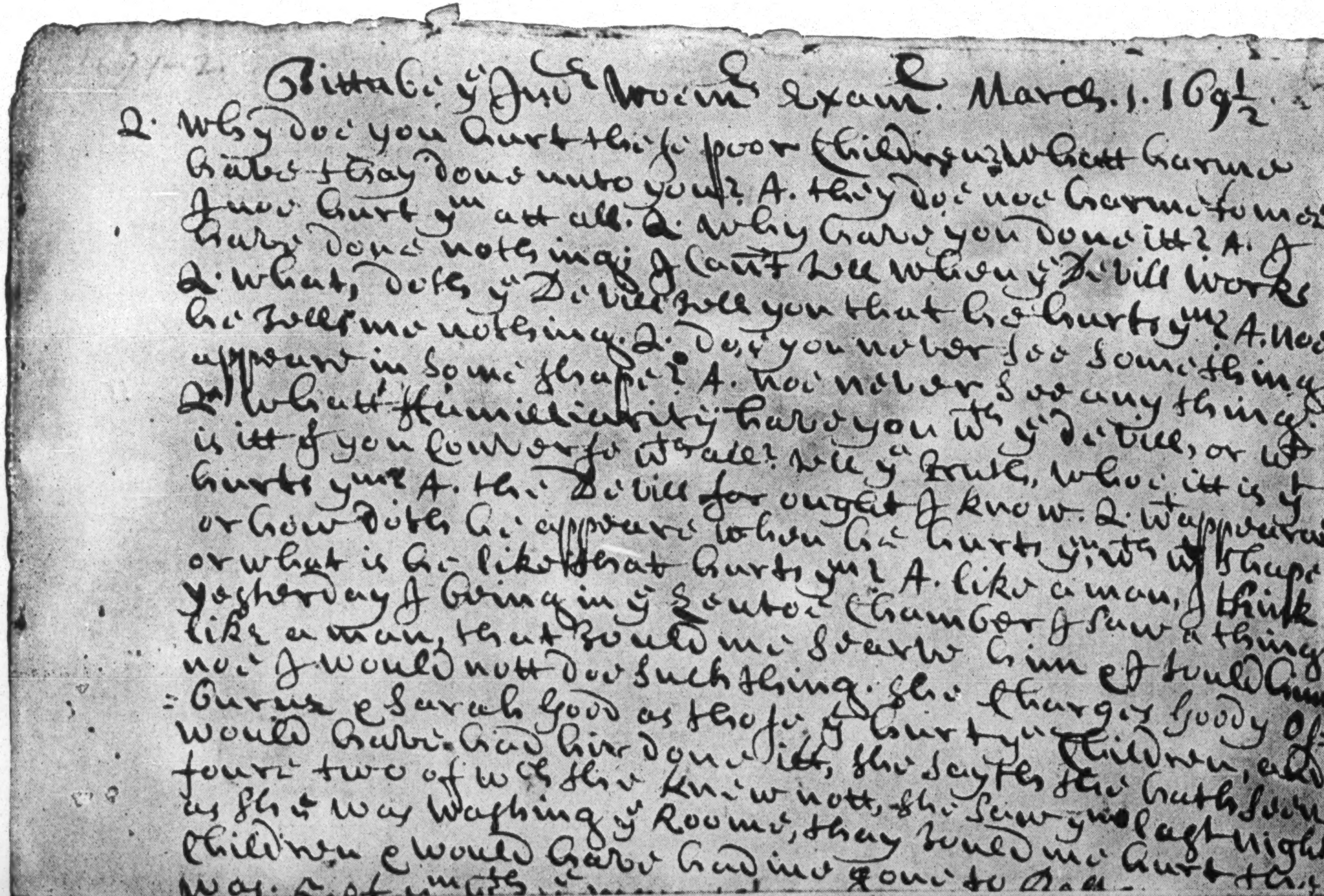
dated June 18 of that year, informs us that "it was agreed and voted by general concurrence, that for Mr. Parris his encouragement and settlement in the work of the ministry amongst us, we will give him sixty-six pounds for his yearly salary, — one third paid in money, the other two third parts for provisions, etc.; and Mr. Parris to find himself firewood, and Mr. Parris to keep the ministry-house in good repair; and that Mr. Parris shall also have the use of the ministry-pasture, and the inhabitants to keep the fence in repair; and that we will keep up our contributions . . . so long as Mr. Parris continues in the work of the ministry amongst us, and all productions to be good and merchantable. And if it please God to bless the inhabitants, we shall be willing to give more; and to expect that, if God shall diminish the estates of the people, that then Mr. Parris do abate of his salary according to proportion." [1]

Samuel Parris, the pastor

This arrangement was far from satisfying the new minister, for it only gave him the use of the parsonage and its pasture lands, whereas he was determined to get a fee simple of both. Another entry in the parish book says that it was voted to make over to him that real estate, but this entry is not duly signed by the clerk, and at the time there were parishioners who declared that it must have been put into the book by fraudulent means. Out of these circumstances there grew a quarrel which for utterly ruthless and truculent bitterness had scarcely been equalled even in the envenomed annals of New England parishes. Many people refused to pay their church-rates, till the meeting-house began to suffer for want of repairs, and complaints were made to the county court. Matters were made worse by Parris's coarse and arrogant manners, and his excessive severity in inflicting church discipline for trivial offences. By 1691 the factions into which the village was divided were ready to fly at each other's throats. Christian charity and

Parish troubles in Salem Village

[1] [C. W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*, i. 291.]


Titibe an Indian Woman's Exam. March. 1. 169½
Q. Why doe you hurt these poor Children? whatt harme
have they done unto you? A. they doe noe harme to me
I noe hurt ym att all. Q. why have you done itt? A. I
have done nothing; I can't tell when ye Devill works
Q. what, doth ye Devill tell you that he hurts ym? A. noe
he tells me nothing. Q. doe you never see something
appeare in some shape? A. noe never see any thing.
Q. whatt ffamilliarity have you wth ye devill, or wt
is itt yt you converse wthall? tell ye truth, whoe itt is yt
hurts ym? A. the Devill for ought I know. Q. wt appearance
or how doth he appeare when he hurts ym, wth wt shape
or what is he like that hurts ym? A. like a man, I think
yesterday I being in ye Lentoe Chamber I saw a thing
like a man, that tould me searve him & I tould him
noe I would nott doe such thing. she charges Goody Os-
burne & Sarah Good as those yt hurt ye Children, and
would have had hir done itt, she sayth she hath seen
foure two of wch she knew nott, she saw ym last night
as she was washing ye Roome, they tould me hurt the
Children & would have had me gone to Bos-
[illegible]

FACSIMILE OF EXAMINATION OF TITUBA

loving-kindness were well-nigh forgotten. It was a spectacle such as Old Nick must have contemplated with grim satisfaction.

Mr. Parris's coloured servants

In the household at the parsonage were two coloured servants whom Parris had brought with him from the West Indies. The man was known as John Indian; the hag Tituba, who passed for his wife, was half-Indian and half-negro. Their intelligence was of a low grade, but it sufficed to make them experts in palmistry, fortune-telling, magic, second-sight, and incantations. Such lore is always attractive to children, and in the winter of 1691–92 quite a little circle of young girls got into the habit of meeting at the parsonage to try their hands at the Black Art. Under the tuition of the Indian servants they soon learned how to go into trances, talk gibberish, and behave like pythonesses of the most approved sort These girls were Parris's daughter Elizabeth, aged nine, and his niece Abigail Williams, aged eleven; Mary Walcott and Elizabeth Hubbard, each aged seventeen; Elizabeth Booth and Susannah Sheldon, each eighteen; Mary Warren and Sarah Churchill, each aged twenty. Conspicuous above all in the mischief that followed were two girls of wonderful adroitness and hardihood, Ann Putnam, aged twelve, daughter of Sergeant Thomas Putnam, and Mercy Lewis, aged seventeen, a servant in his family. This Thomas Putnam, who had taken part in the great Narragansett fight, was parish clerk and belonged to an aristocratic family. One of his nephews was Israel Putnam, of Revolutionary fame. Mistress Ann Putnam, the sergeant's wife, was a beautiful and well-educated woman of thirty, but so passionate and high-strung that in her best moments she was scarcely quite sane. She was deeply engaged in the village quarrels; she also played an important part in supporting her daughter Ann and her servant Mercy Lewis in some of the most shocking work of that

The "afflicted children"

Mistress Ann Putnam

JUDGE CORWIN HOUSE, SALEM (THE SO-CALLED WITCH HOUSE)

year. Beside Mrs. Putnam, two other grown women, one Sarah Vibber and a certain Goody Pope, appeared among the sufferers, but were of no great account. The minister withdrew his own daughter early in the proceedings and sent her to stay with some friends in Salem town. The chief managers of the witchcraft business, then, were two barbarous Indians steeped to the marrow in demonolatry, the half-crazed and vindictive Mrs. Putnam, and nine girls between the ages of eleven and twenty.

These girls came to be known as the "Afflicted Children." Their proceedings began at the parsonage about Christmas time, 1691. They would get down on all fours, crawl under chairs and tables, go off into fits, and speak an unintelligible jargon. All this may have been begun in sport. It would doubtless tickle them to find how well they could imitate Indian medicine,

Beginnings of the troubles

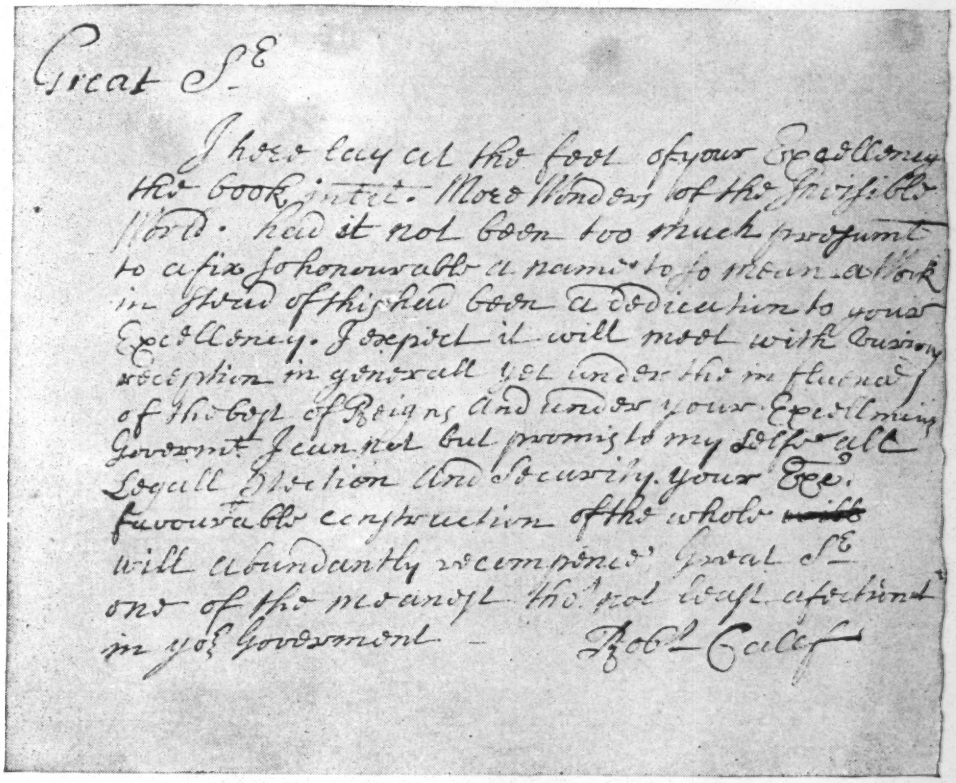
and the temptation to show off their accomplishments would be too great to be resisted. Then if they found their elders taking the affair too seriously, if they suddenly saw themselves in danger of getting whipped for meddling with such uncanny matters, what could be more natural than for them to seek an avenue of escape by declaring that they were bewitched and could not help doing as they did? As to these first steps the records leave us in the dark, but somewhat such, I suspect, they must have been. The next thing would be to ask them who bewitched them; and here the road to mischief was thrown open by Mr. Parris taking the affair into his own hands with a great flourish of trumpets, and making it as public as possible. Such was this man's way, as different as possible from Cotton Mather's. Physicians and clergymen, who came from all quarters to see the girls, agreed that they must be suffering from witchcraft. When commanded to point out their tormentors, they first named the Indian hag Tituba, and then Sarah Good and Sarah Osburn, two forlorn old women of the village, who were not held in high esteem. On the last day of February, 1692, these three were arrested, and the examinations began next day. The chief accusations against Sarah Good were that after she had spoken angrily to some neighbours their cattle sickened and died; that she threw Mary Walcott and other children into convulsions; and that she tried to persuade Ann Putnam to sign her name in a book. It was supposed that such signatures were equivalent to a quitclaim deed surrendering the signer's soul to the Devil; and his agents, the witches, were supposed to go about with that infernal autograph book soliciting signatures. Similar charges were brought against the other prisoners. In their presence the afflicted children raved and screamed. At the indignant denials of the two old white women the violence of these paroxysms became frightful, but when Tituba confessed that she was

Physicians and clergymen called in

The trial of Sarah Good

an adept in witchcraft and had enchanted the girls, their symptoms vanished and perfect calm ensued. As the result of the examination the three prisoners were sent to the jail in Boston to await their trial.[1]

The country was now getting alarmed, and the girls began



Great S^E

I here lay at the feet of your Excellency the book intit. More Wonders of the Invisible World. had it not been too much presumt to a fix so honourable a name to so mean a Work in stead of this had been a dedication to your Excellency. I expect it will meet with various reception in generall yet under the influence of the best of Reigns And under your Excellency Governmt I can not but promis to my selfe all Legall Protection And Security. your Exc. favourable construction of the whole ~~will~~ will abundantly recompence Great S^E one of the meanest tho' not least afectionat in yor Government — Robt Calef

FACSIMILIE OF LETTER OF ROBERT CALEF

to feel their power. Their next blow was aimed at victims of far higher sort. The wretched Tituba knew human nature well enough to consult her own safety by acting as king's evidence,[2] and in her examination she testified that four women

[1] [For the details of these examinations, see W. E. Woodward, *Records of Salem Witchcraft*, Roxbury, Mass., 1864, i. 1–49; Upham, ii. 4–32; Nevins, *Witchcraft in Salem Village*, pp. 57–69.]

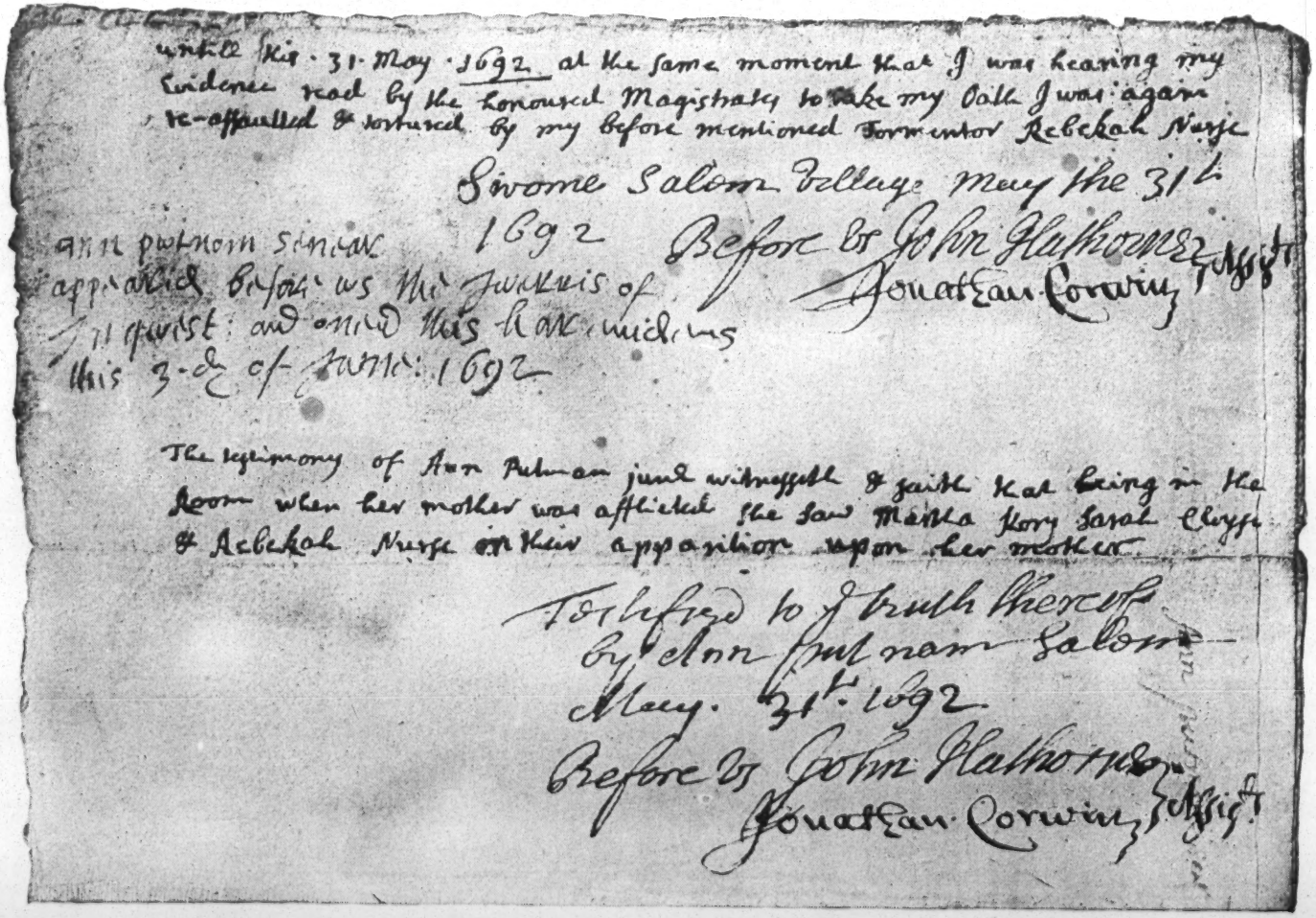
[2] ["The account she since gives of it is that her master did beat her, and otherways abuse her, to make her confess and accuse (such

of the village tormented the girls; two of them were Good and Osburn, but the faces of the other two she said she could not see. After Tituba had gone to prison, the girls were urged to give up the names of these other two tormentors. At first they refused, but shortly it began to be whispered in bated breath that some of the most respected and godly persons in the village were leagued with Satan in this horrible conspiracy. About the middle of March the whole community was thunderstruck by the arrest of Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse. Of these two ladies the former was about sixty years of age, the latter more than seventy. As they were addressed not as "Mrs.," but as "Goodwife," their position was not exactly aristocratic. It was nevertheless most respectable. They were thoroughly well-bred and well-educated ladies, full of sweet courtesy and simple-hearted kindliness, like the best of farmers' wives in New England villages of to-day. Martha Corey was third wife of Giles Corey, a farmer eighty years old, a man of herculean stature and strength, proud, self-willed, and contentious, but frank and noble, with a rash, unruly tongue. He had been in many a quarrel, and had made enemies. His wife, so far as we know, had not. She was a woman of deep and sincere piety, with as clear and sound a head as could be found anywhere between Cape Cod and Cape Ann. She disbelieved in witchcraft, was inclined to regard it as a mere delusion, and had no sympathy with the excitement which was beginning to turn the village topsy-turvy. She did not flock with the multitude to see the accusing girls, but she reproved her more credulous husband for giving heed to such tomfoolery, and he, with that uncurbed tongue of his, was heard to utter

The accusation of Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse

Character of Martha Corey

as he called) her sister-witches: and that whatsoever she said by way of confessing, or accusing others, was the effect of such usage." Robert Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World*, Salem reprint, 1823, p. 189.]



untill this · 31 · May · 1692 at the same moment that I was hearing my
Evidence read by the honoured Magistrates to take my Oath I was again
re-assaulted & tortured by my before mentioned Tormentor Rebekah Nurse

Sworne Salem village May the 31th
1692 Before us John Hathorne
Jonathan Corwin } Assist

Ann putnam senear
appeared before us the Jurrors of
Inquest: and owned this hare midens
this 3 dy of June: 1692

The testimony of Ann Putnam junr witnesseth & saith that being in the
Room when her mother was afflicted she saw Martha Kory Sarah Cloyse
& Rebekah Nurse on their apparition upon her mother.

Testified to y truth thereof
by Ann Putnam Salem
May. 31th 1692
Before us John Hathorne
Jonathan Corwin } Assist

FACSIMILE OF DEPOSITION OF MRS. ANN PUTNAM AND HER DAUGHTER, MAY 31, 1692

indiscreet jests about his good wife's scepticism. It was probably this that caused her to be selected as a victim. Sceptics must be made to feel the danger of impugning the authority of the accusers and the truth of their tales. Accordingly Martha Corey, accused by little Ann Putnam, was soon in jail awaiting trial.

The next was Rebecca Nurse. She was one of three sisters, daughters of William Towne of Yarmouth, in England.

Rebecca Nurse

Her two sisters, who were arrested soon after her, were Mary Easty and Sarah Cloyse. With their husbands they were all persons held in highest esteem, but an ancient village feud had left a grudge against them in some revengeful bosoms. Half a century before there had been a fierce dispute between parties from Salem and from Topsfield who had settled in the border region between the two townships. The dispute related to the possession of certain lots of land; it had grown more and more complicated,

A village feud

and it had engendered hard feelings between the Putnams on one side and the Eastys and Townes on the other. Besides this, Rebecca Nurse and her husband had become obnoxious to the Putnams and to the Rev. Mr. Parris from reasons connected with the church dispute. There was evidently a method in the madness of the accusing girls. Rebecca Nurse was arrested two days after the committal of Martha Corey. The appearance of this venerable and venerated lady before the magistrates caused most profound sensation. Her numerous children and grandchildren stood high in public esteem, her husband was one of the most honoured persons in the community, herself a model of every virtue. As she stood there, delicate and fragile in figure, with those honest eyes that looked one full

The examination of Rebecca Nurse

in the face, that soft gray hair and dainty white muslin kerchief, one marvels what fiend can have possessed those young girls that they did not shamefastly hold their peace. In the intervals of question

Thomas Wallen bought of mr John Sprague Novem 1790

A BRIEF and TRUE

NARRATIVE

Of ſome Remarkable Paſſages Relating to ſundry Perſons Afflicted by

VVitchcraft,

AT

SALEM VILLAGE:

Which happened from the Nineteenth of *March*, to the Fifth of *April*, 1692.

Collected by *Deodat Lawſon.*

Boſton, *Printed* for Benjamin Harris *and are to be Sold at his Shop, over-againſt the* Old-Meeting-Houſe. 1692.

TITLE OF LAWSON'S "A BRIEF AND TRUE NARRATIVE"

and answer they went into fits as usual. When the magistrate Hathorne became visibly affected by the lady's clear and straightforward answers, the relentless Mrs. Putnam broke out with a violence dreadful to behold: "Did you not bring the black man with you? Did you not bid me tempt God and die? How often have you eaten and drunk your own damnation?" At this outburst, like the horrible snarl of a lioness, the poor old lady raised her hands toward heaven and cried, "O Lord, help me!" Whereupon all the afflicted girls "were grievously vexed." Hathorne thought that their spasms were caused by a mysterious influence emanating from Goodwife Nurse's lifted hands, and so his heart was hardened toward her. Mary Walcott cried out that the prisoner was biting her, and then showed marks of teeth upon her wrist. Thus the abominable scene went on till Rebecca Nurse was remanded to jail to await her trial.

That was on a Thursday morning. The Rev. Deodat Lawson, a fine scholar and powerful preacher, had arrived in the village a few days before, and it was known that he was to preach the afternoon sermon familiar in those days as the Thursday lecture. He had scarcely arrived when two or three of the girls called upon him and drove him nearly out of his wits with their performances. Their victory over him was complete, and the result was seen in that Thursday lecture, which was afterwards printed, and is a literary production of great intensity and power. The arrests of Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse had destroyed all confidence, everybody distrusted his neighbour, and that impassioned sermon goaded the whole community to madness. If the Devil could use such "gospel women" for his instruments, what safety was there for anybody? Arrests went on with increasing rapidity during the spring and summer, until at least 126 persons, of whom we know the names and something of the family history, were lodged in jail;

Deodat Lawson

The spread of the delusion

and these names do not exhaust the number. Among them — to mention only such as were executed — we may note that John Procter and the venerable George Jacobs had each had one of the accusing girls in his family as a domestic servant, and in both cases personal malice was visibly at work. In the case of George Jacobs it may also be observed that his own granddaughter, to save her own life, confessed herself a witch, and testified against him; afterward she confessed this horrible wickedness. Sarah Wildes, Elizabeth How, and Mary Easty

Cases of personal malice

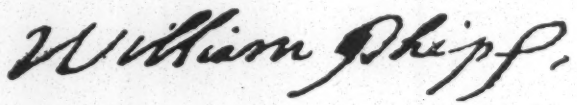
THE JACOBS HOUSE, SALEM

were connected with the Topsfield affair already mentioned. Some, such as Susannah Martin, seem to have owed their fate to mere superstition of the lowest sort. On a rainy day she walked over a good bit of country road without getting her hose or skirts muddy, and it was sagely concluded that such neatness could only have been attained through the aid

of the Devil. She was mother of the Mabel Martin about whom Whittier wrote his beautiful poem, "The Witch's Daughter." John Willard incurred his doom for having said that it was the accusing girls who were the real witches worthy of the gallows, and John Procter in a similar spirit had said that by the judicious application of a cudgel he could effect a prompt and thorough cure for all the little hussies. People who ventured such remarks took their lives in their hands.

The boldest and most remarkable of all these arrests was that of the Rev. George Burroughs, and it was one of the cases in which malice was most clearly concerned. This gentleman was graduated at Harvard College in 1670, and had been pastor over the church in Salem Village from 1680 to 1682. He had left there because of church feuds, in which he had the misfortune to belong to the party hostile to Mrs. Ann Putnam and her friends. He was afterwards settled over a church in Wells, Maine, and was living there quietly in 1692, when about the first of May he was arrested and taken to Salem to answer a charge of witchcraft. His physical strength was alleged against him. Though small in frame he could carry a barrel of cider and hold out a heavy musket at arm's length, which without infernal aid was not likely. On accusations brought by the afflicted girls he was thrown into prison.[1]

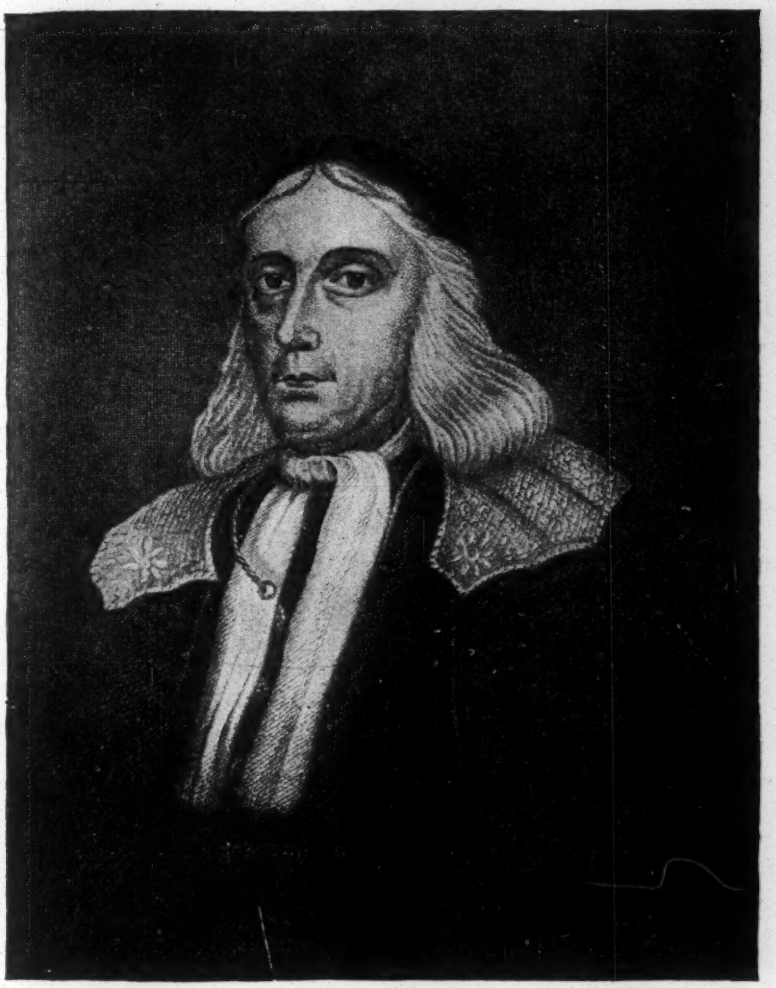
The Rev. George Burroughs



All the events thus far recounted happened under the provisional government of Massachusetts that followed the overthrow of Andros. Now in the middle of May the first royal governor, Sir William Phips, arrived in Boston with the new charter. Military duties soon called him far down East, and he did not return till October.

The special court erected

[1] [Cf. Nevins, *Witchcraft in Salem Village*, pp. 131 ff.]



Wm. Stoughton

Before his departure he appointed a special court of Oyer and Terminer to try the witchcraft cases. William Stoughton was presiding justice, and among his colleagues it may suffice to mention John Hathorne for his connection with one of the most illustrious names in modern literature, and

Samuel Sewall, in whose voluminous diary we have such a wonderful picture of that old Puritan society.

Early in the proceedings this court requested the opinion of the ministers in Boston and neighbouring towns concerning the subject then uppermost in all minds. The opinion, written by Cotton Mather, one of the youngest of the ministers, and subscribed by all the most eminent, was calm and judicial. It ran as follows: —

BOSTON, June 15, 1692.

The advice of the ministers

1. "The afflicted state of our poor neighbours that are now suffering by molestations from the Invisible World we apprehend so deplorable, that we think their condition calls for the utmost help of all persons in their several capacities.

2. "We cannot but with all thankfulness acknowledge the success which the merciful God has given unto the sedulous and assiduous endeavours of our honourable rulers to detect the abominable witchcrafts which have been committed in the country; humbly praying that the discovery of these mysterious and mischievous wickednesses may be perfected.

3. "We judge that, in the prosecution of these and all such witchcrafts there is need of a very critical and exquisite caution, lest by too much credulity for things received only upon the devil's authority, there be a door opened for a long train of miserable consequences, and Satan get an advantage over us; for we should not be ignorant of his devices.

4. "As in complaints upon witchcraft there may be matters of inquiry which do not amount unto matters of presumption, and there may be matters of presumption which yet may not be matters of conviction, so it is necessary that all proceedings thereabout be managed with an exceeding tenderness toward those that may be complained of, especially if they have been persons formerly of an unblemished reputation.

5. "When the first inquiry is made into the circumstances

of such as may lie under the just suspicion of witchcrafts, we could wish that there may be admitted as little as possible of such noise, company and openness as may too hastily expose them that are examined, and that there may be nothing used as a test for the trial of the suspected, the lawfulness whereof may be doubted by the people of God, but that the directions given by such judicious writers as Perkins and Barnard may be observed.

6. "Presumptions whereupon persons may be committed, and much more, convictions whereupon persons may be condemned as guilty of witchcrafts, ought certainly to be more considerable than barely the accused persons being represented by a spectre unto the afflicted, inasmuch as it is an undoubted and notorious thing, that a demon may by God's permission appear, even to ill purposes, in the shape of an innocent, yea, and a virtuous man. Nor can we esteem alterations made in the sufferers, by a look or touch of the accused, to be an infallible evidence of guilt, but frequently liable to be abused by the devil's legerdemains.

7. "We know not whether some remarkable affronts given the devils, by our disbelieving these testimonies whose whole force and strength is from them alone, may not put a period unto the progress of the dreadful calamity begun upon us, in the accusation of so many persons, whereof some, we hope, are yet clear from the great transgression laid to their charge.

8. "Nevertheless, we cannot but humbly recommend unto the government, the speedy and vigorous prosecutions of such as have rendered themselves obnoxious, according to the directions given in the laws of God and the wholesome statutes of the English nation for the detection of witchcrafts."

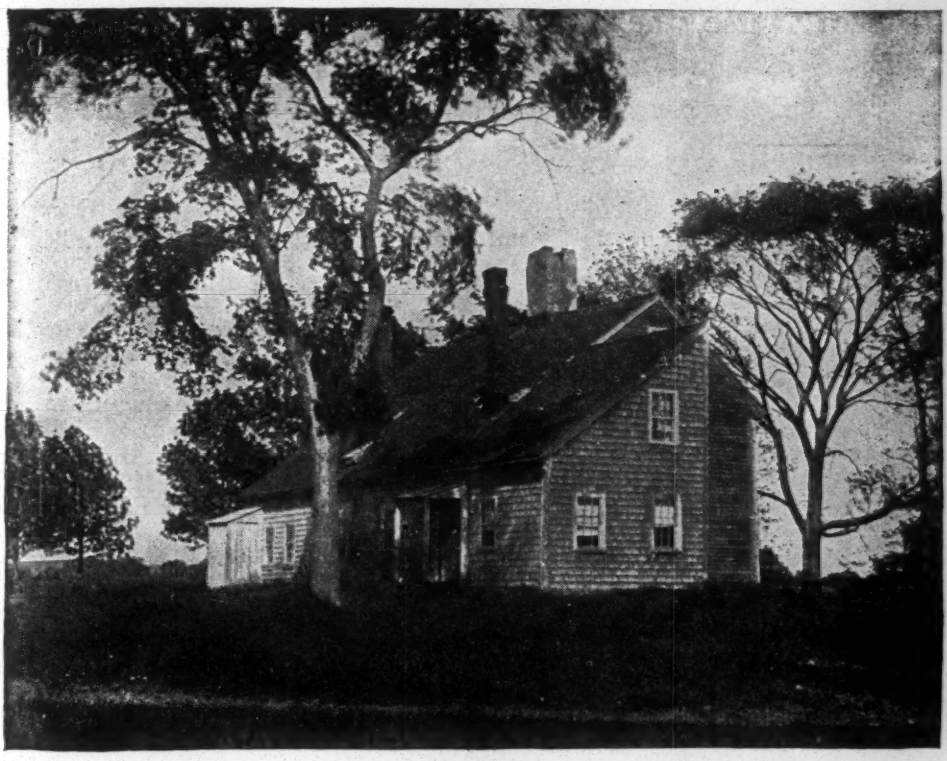
Had these recommendations been followed, not a single capital conviction could have been secured. Note the warning to the judges against relying upon "spectral evidence" or upon the physical effects apparently wrought upon the

accusers by the presence of the accused persons, since evidence of that sort is "frequently liable to be abused by the devil's legerdemains." Now every one of the victims was convicted and hung upon the strength of "spectral evidence" or the tantrums of the afflicted children, or both combined.

Spectral evidence

And what, pray, was "spectral evidence"? Little Ann Putnam's testimony against Mr. Burroughs was an instance of it. She said that one evening the apparition of a minister came to her and asked her to write her name in the devil's book; then came the forms of two women in winding sheets, and looked angrily upon the minister and scolded him till he was fain to vanish away; then the women told little Ann that they were the ghosts of Mr. Burroughs's first and second wives whom he had murdered, and one of them showed the very place under the left arm where he had stabbed her. At another time three other persons who had recently died appeared to Ann and accused Mr. Burroughs of murdering them, and commanded her to tell these things to the magistrates before Mr. Burroughs's face. On such evidence was a gentleman and scholar condemned to death.[1] So when Mercy Lewis was found sobbing and screaming, "Dear Lord, receive my soul," "O Lord, let them not kill me quite," the same Ann Putnam and Abigail Williams were sent for to see what was the matter, and both declared that they saw the apparitions of Mary Easty and John Willard pinching and biting and strangling poor Mercy Lewis. On such evidence Mary Easty and John Willard were sent to the gallows. With such ghost stories did Mary Walcott and Elizabeth Hubbard convict Rebecca Nurse of three hideous murders, naming persons who had died within a few years. When the astounded old lady called upon God to witness her innocence, the girls all went into fits. Nevertheless it was hard to obtain a verdict against her.

[1] [See Cotton Mather's account of Burroughs's case, *Wonders of the Invisible World*, pp. 120 ff.]



THE NOURSE HOUSE, SALEM

An ancestor of mine (my great-grandfather's great-great-grandfather), Dr. John Fisk, one of the most eminent physicians in the colony, then lived in Wenham, within four miles of Mr. Parris's meeting-house. The family tradition has it that he was sceptical about witchcraft. His uncle, Thomas Fisk, was a firm believer in witchcraft, but disapproved of spectral evidence. He was foreman of the jury in the trial of Rebecca Nurse, and the verdict was Not Guilty, whereat the girls began screaming and rolling about as if all Bedlam were let loose. The judges then told the jury that they must have overlooked one fact, — that in an unguarded moment the prisoner had really confessed her guilt! It seems that one of the prisoners, Deliverance Hobbs, had gone clean daft with fright, confessed herself a witch, and joined the accusing girls as a sort of king's evidence. When she was brought in to testify against

The jury acquit Rebecca Nurse

Rebecca Nurse, the old lady exclaimed: "What! do you bring *her?* She is one of us." Of course she meant *one of us prisoners*, but the atrabilious chief justice was sure she meant *one of us witches*, and he insisted that the jury should go out again. They were not convinced, but presently returning to the court-room asked the accused to explain what she meant. She made no reply, and the jury at length reluctantly accepted this silence as a confession of guilt. Afterwards she explained that, being somewhat "hard of hearing and full of grief," she did not realize what was asked of her. She was sentenced none the less, and after being excommunicated from the church with elaborate ceremony was taken to the gallows. Thomas Fisk, the juryman who held out longest, made a written statement afterward in which he declared that what finally overcame him was her sudden silence at the critical moment. The whole incident is a pretty clear case of judges browbeating jury.[1]

The court sends them back

The case of Mary Easty, sister of Rebecca Nurse, still further illustrates the fierce persistency of the accusing girls and the completeness of the influence which they exercised over a large portion of the community. Mary Easty had been arrested soon after her sister, but had borne herself so well upon examination that after two months' imprisonment she was set free on May 18. Evidently, the accusing girls made up their minds that it would not do to allow this sort of thing. One day elapsed, during which they had plenty of time to interchange messages with one another and with Mrs. Putnam. On the 20th, at about nine o'clock in the morning, Mercy Lewis, being at John Putnam's house, was suddenly seized with the paroxysms above mentioned. Let us observe the rapidity with which the desired effects were produced. A neighbour named Samuel Abbey was

The case of Mary Easty

[1] [See Calef, *New Wonders of the Invisible World*, pp. 209–211; Nevins, *Witchcraft in Salem Village*, pp. 125–130.]

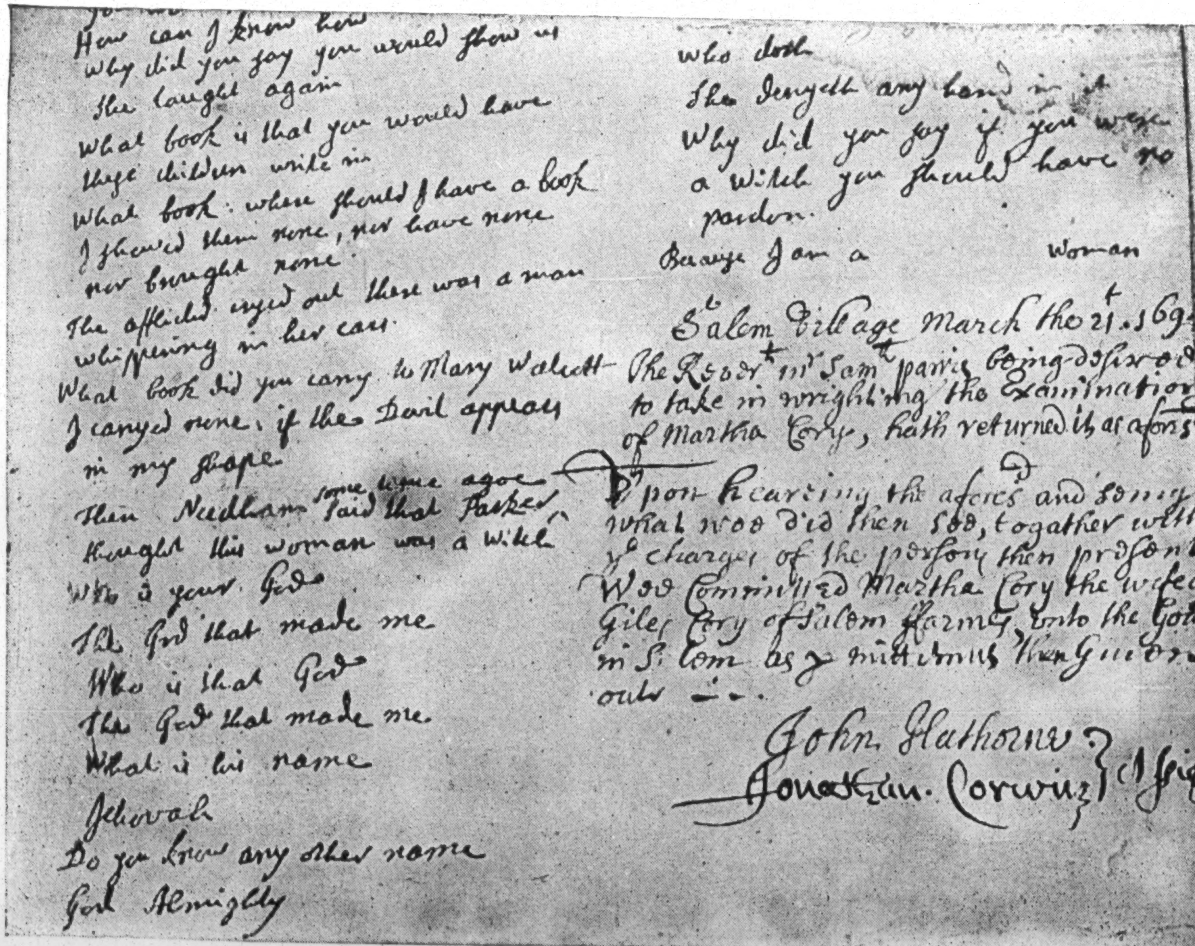
sent in all haste to Thomas Putnam's house, to bring little Ann to see what was the matter. The distance was about a mile. He found Abigail Williams with Ann, and brought the two girls back with him. On the way, they both exclaimed that they saw the apparition of Goody Easty afflicting Mercy Lewis. When they arrived upon the scene, they found Mercy in convulsions, apparently choked and strangled,

PART OF GALLOWS' HILL, SALEM

and catching for each breath as if it were the last. The two girls exclaimed, "There are Goody Easty and John Willard and Mary Whittredge afflicting poor Mercy Lewis!" After this had continued for some time, a messenger was sent up to Captain Jonathan Walcott's to get his daughter Mary. The distance was a mile and a half. She arrived about one o'clock, and immediately cried out that she saw the spectre of Mary Easty standing over the patient and tightening a chain about her neck. Presently a messenger was sent to the house of Dr. Griggs, three and a half miles distant, to get Elizabeth Hubbard, who upon her arrival immediately

saw Goody Easty, as she said, torturing Mercy in a most dreadful manner. Occasionally Mercy would grow tired, but as her convulsions ceased, Elizabeth Hubbard would be seized with fits and would ask the spectre why she had brought with her a coffin and winding-sheet. By eight o'clock in the evening the room was full of neighbours, who were so impressed by the acting of the girl that some of them were afterward ready to testify that they saw the winding-sheet, the coffin, and the devil's autograph book, and heard words uttered by the spectre as well as by the girls. About eight o'clock two messengers went to Salem town to apply to Justice Hathorne for a warrant for the arrest of Mary Easty. The distance was seven miles. Hathorne at once issued the warrant, which bears the date, May 20. The constable went with it to the house of Isaac Easty, nine miles distant, which he seems to have reached about midnight. For two days poor Mary had enjoyed her freedom, the comforts of home, and the pleasure of being once more with her husband and children. Now at midnight she was aroused from sleep, carried off to prison, and put in irons, after which the constable returned seven miles to John Putnam's house to witness the performances of Mercy Lewis until dawn. Mercy kept screaming, "What! Have you brought me the winding-sheet, Goodwife Easty? Well, I had rather go into the winding-sheet than set my hand to the book." About daybreak she fell asleep, but only for a short time; her paroxysms were not finished until Mary Easty had been examined before Hathorne and finally committed to prison early the next morning. Nothing could show more forcibly than the events of that 20th of May the extent to which the community was dominated by the accusing girls. There is no hint that among all the bystanders who watched Mercy Lewis in the course of that day and night there was one who ventured to express any doubt as to the reality of the pretended apparitions. Indeed, the slightest expression of any such

Mary Easty torn from her home at midnight



How can I know how
Why did you say you would show us
She laught again
What book is that you would have
these children write in
What book: where should I have a book
I showed them none, nor have none
nor brought none.
The afflicted cryed out there was a man
whispering in her ears
What book did you carry to Mary Walcott
I carryed none. if the Devil appears
in my shape
Then Needham said that Parker some time agoe
thought this woman was a Witch
Who is your God
The God that made me
Who is that God
The God that made me.
What is his name
Jehovah
Do you know any other name
God Almighty
who doth
She denyeth any hand in it
Why did you say if you were
a Witch you should have no
pardon.
Because I am a Woman

Salem Village March the 21st 1691/2
The Revd mr Saml parris being desired
to take in wrighting the Examination
of Martha Cory, hath returned it as afores[ai]d

Upon hearing the afores[ai]d and seeing
what wee did then see, together with
ye charges of the persons then present
Wee Committed Martha Cory the wife of
Giles Cory of Salem Farmes, unto the Goale
in Salem as p mittimus then given
out . . .

John Hathorne } Assis[ts]
Jonathan Corwin }

FACSIMILE OF END OF EXAMINATION OF MARTHA COREY

doubt would have been fraught with peril to the doubter, and it is most likely that none but willing believers made bold to attend the scene. It only need be added that after Mary Easty was finally committed for trial and the news of it reached John Putnam's house, the wretched Mercy Lewis at once recovered, thus sealing the belief in the truth of her story. From that moment it was a foregone conclusion that Goody Easty must die, slain by the same degrading methods which had achieved the destruction of her sister.

Doubt perilous

Further details of the trials seem unnecessary; it was but the same old story repeated. In all, nineteen persons were hanged, one died of ill-treatment in prison, and the old wretch Tituba was sold into slavery to pay for her board in prison. One often hears people allude to the burning of witches in New England; no persons were ever burned there by white people for witchcraft. One cruel punishment, however, was inflicted on this occasion for the only time in American history. In old English law, in cases working corruption of blood, the refusal to plead either guilty or not guilty to an indictment would prevent confiscation of estates. Hence a prisoner would sometimes refuse to plead, and in order to overcome his obstinacy the law would stretch him on the floor and pile weights upon his chest until the breath was gradually squeezed from his body. This was appropriately called the *peine forte et dure*. Now Giles Corey was arrested for witchcraft in April. His wife, who had been in jail since March, was sentenced to death on September 10, and his own trial came two or three days later. The knowledge that thoughtless words of his, uttered in jest, had been used against his wife, had broken his heart, but not his will of iron. This man, who in all his eighty years had never known the meaning of fear, expected nothing but death, and probably wished for nothing better, but he had made up his mind to

Peine forte et dure

leave his property where he pleased, and baulk his enemies of at least one gratification. So he stood mute before the court until he was taken out and pressed to death. Nothing could quell that indomitable spirit. Three days later, on September 22, his good wife and seven companions were taken to the gallows. One of the most busy witch-hunters, ever since the affair began, had been Rev. Nicholas Noyes, pastor of the First Church in Salem town. Such meagre pity as his soul found room for was expressed when he pointed to the swinging bodies and exclaimed, "What a sad thing it is to see eight firebrands of hell hanging there!"[1] Some weeks before, this truculent Mr. Noyes had been present at the execution of Sarah Good, and just before she was turned off he said to her, "You are a witch, and you know you are!" The spirited answer of the dying woman is refreshing to read: "You are a liar! I am no more a witch than you are a wizard, and if you take away my life, God will give you blood to drink!"[2]

The Rev. Mr. Noyes

In strong contrast with this were the dying words of that noble Christian woman, Mary Easty:—

"The humble petition of Mary Easty unto his Excellency, Sir William Phips, and to the Honoured Judge and Bench now sitting in Judicature in Salem, and the Reverend Ministers, humbly showeth, that, whereas your poor and humble petitioner, being condemned to die, do humbly beg of you to take it in your judicious and pious consideration, that your poor and humble petitioner, knowing my own innocency, blessed be the Lord for it! and seeing plainly the wiles and subtilty of my accusers by myself, cannot but judge charitably of others that are going the same way of myself, if the Lord steps not mightily in. I was confined a whole month upon the same account that I am condemned now for, and then cleared by the afflicted persons, as some of Your Honours know. And

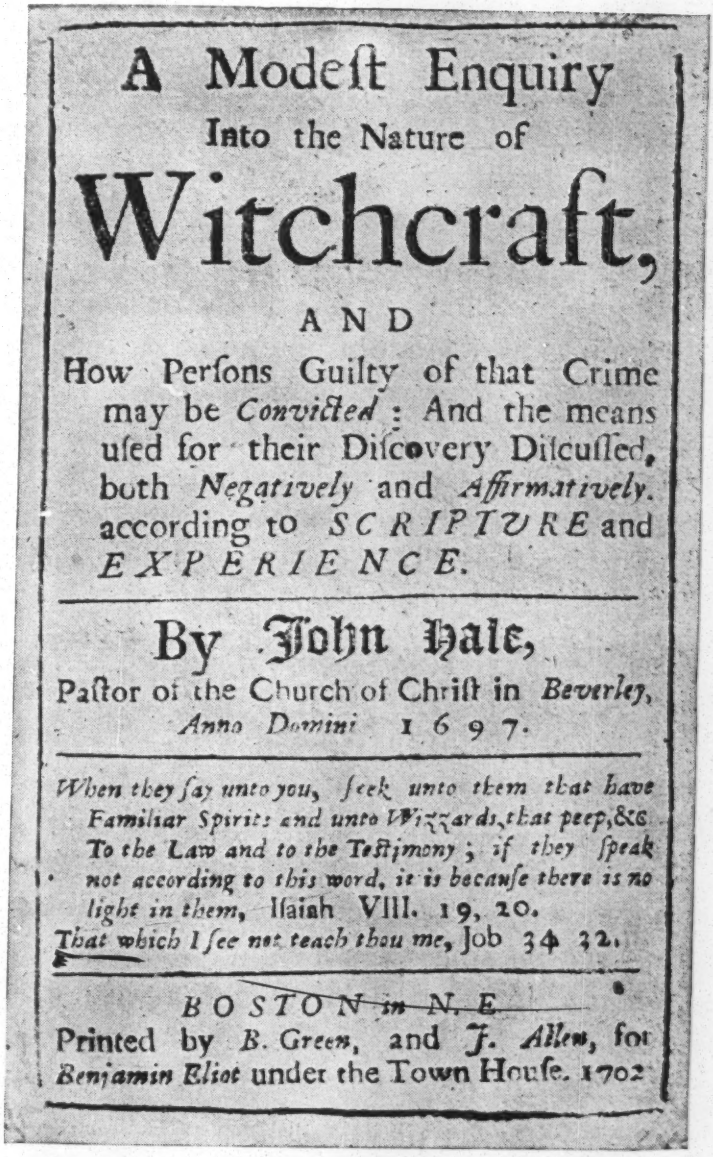
The petition of Mary Easty

[1] [Calef, p. 221.] [2] [Calef, p. 209.]

in two days' time I was cried out upon [by] them, and have been confined, and now am condemned to die. The Lord above knows my innocency then, and likewise does now, as at the great day will be known to men and angels. I petition not to Your Honours for my own life, for I know I must die, and my appointed time is set; but the Lord he knows it is that, if it be possible, no more innocent blood may be shed, which undoubtedly cannot be avoided in the way and course you go in. I question not but Your Honors do to the utmost of your powers in the discovery and detecting of witchcraft and witches, and would not be guilty of innocent blood for the world. But, by my own innocency, I know you are in the wrong way. The Lord in his infinite mercy direct you in this great work, if it be his blessed will that no more innocent blood be shed! I would humbly beg of you, that Your Honours would be pleased to examine these afflicted persons strictly, and keep them apart some time, and likewise to try some of these confessing witches; I being confident there is several of them has belied themselves and others, as will appear, if not in this world, I am sure in the world to come, whither I am now agoing. I question not but you will see an alteration of these things. They say myself and others having made a league with the Devil, we cannot confess. I know, and the Lord knows, as will [shortly] appear, they belie me, and so I question not but they do others. The Lord above, who is the Searcher of all hearts, knows, as I shall answer it at the tribunal seat, that I know not the least thing of witchcraft; therefore I cannot, I dare not, belie my own soul. I beg Your Honours not to deny this my humble petition from a poor, dying, innocent person. And I question not but the Lord will give a blessing to your endeavours." [1]

Her warning

[1] [Upham, ii. 328, 329; Calef, pp. 219, 220. There are slight differences in the two texts. The two insertions in brackets are from Calef's text.]



A Modeſt Enquiry
Into the Nature of
Witchcraft,
AND
How Perſons Guilty of that Crime may be *Convicted*: And the means uſed for their Diſcovery Diſcuſſed, both *Negatively* and *Affirmatively*. according to *SCRIPTURE* and *EXPERIENCE*.

By John Hale,
Paſtor of the Church of Chriſt in *Beverley*,
Anno Domini 1697.

When they ſay unto you, ſeek unto them that have Familiar Spirits and unto Wizzards, that peep, &c. To the Law and to the Teſtimony; if they ſpeak not according to this word, it is becauſe there is no light in them, Iſaiah VIII. 19, 20.
That which I ſee not teach thou me, Job 34 32.

BOSTON in N. E.
Printed by *B. Green*, and *J. Allen*, for *Benjamin Eliot* under the Town Houſe. 1702

TITLE OF HALE'S "A MODEST ENQUIRY"

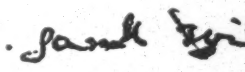
The execution of Mary Easty, Martha Corey, and their six companions was the last scene in the tragedy. Further trials were held, but there were no more executions, and early in 1693 all the prisoners were set free. As to the cause of this sudden collapse in the frenzy we may say that it came, as such collapses always come, when humanity has been outraged more than it will bear. Why did the guillotine stop its work in 1794 just after the fall of Robespierre? The men who overthrew him were not much better than himself, but the state of things had come to be unendurable. Such periods of furious excitement inevitably lead up to a moment of reaction, and the suddenness and completeness of the reaction is apt to be proportionate to the intensity and ferocity of the excitement. The reign of terror in Salem Village was due to a temporary destruction of confidence; everybody became afraid of his neighbours, and there is nothing so pitiless as fear. But many long ages of social discipline based upon mutual confidence, without which human society could not exist, have made that sentiment so strong and tough that it cannot be suppressed for more than a short time. The feeling with which people endured the sight of Rebecca Nurse and George Burroughs and Martha Corey hanged like common felons was a feeling of tension that must soon give way. The accusing girls did not appreciate this point; they became overweeningly bold and aimed too high. Increase Mather, President of Harvard College, had expressed his disapproval of the methods of the court, and a member of his family was accused. Then the girls cried out against Rev. Samuel Willard, pastor of the Old South Church in Boston, a man of as much eminence in his day as the late Phillips Brooks. They even assailed Lady Phips, the governor's wife, who condemned their proceedings and expressed sympathy with the victims. In these instances the girls struck too high. The same

Sudden collapse of the trials

Reaction follows the intense strain

The accusers aim too high

Stoughton and Hathorne, who could take for granted the guilt of Martha Corey, could entertain no such thoughts about Mr. Willard, and when some of the girls mentioned his name they were sharply rebuked and told to hold their tongues. Their final and most fatal mistake was made in October, when they accused Mrs. Hale, wife of the minister in Beverly, a lady known throughout the colony for her noble Christian character. The vile accusation opened the eyes of her husband, who had been active in the pursuit of the witches. He instantly faced about, began to oppose the whole prosecution, and confessed that he had been deceived. This was a fatal blow to the witch-hunters, and the effect was presently enhanced when some high-spirited persons in Andover, on being accused of witchcraft, retorted by bringing an action for defamation of character with heavy damages. This marked the end of the panic, and from that time people began to be quick in throwing off the whole witchcraft delusion.



Accusers threatened with a suit for damages

Another circumstance is worthy of notice in this connection. About three weeks after the execution of Martha Corey and her companions the General Court of Massachusetts was assembled at Boston. It was different from any General Court that had sat before, for it was the first Court elected under the new charter. Under the old charter none but church members could either serve as representatives or vote for representatives.[1] Under the new charter such restrictions were abolished and a property qualification was substituted for them. The effect was not only greatly to widen the suffrage, but also to secularize it. One of the first acts of the new legislature was to abolish the

The Court of Oyer and Terminer abolished

[1] [This was modified in 1664, in response to the king's command, so as to extend the suffrage to all respectable citizens of orthodox opinions.]

special court of Oyer and Terminer under which the witchcraft trials had been held, and to establish a superior court. When the new court met in January, the change was visible. The grand jury began by throwing out more than half of the indictments.[1] In the mean time a tract published by Increase Mather, entitled "Cases of Conscience,"[2] had done much to cast discredit upon spectral evidence.

Cotton Mather

As for Cotton Mather, he had not been present at any of the witch trials, nor do we know of any comment which he made upon them at the time, except that Calef tell us that at the execution of Mr. Burroughs young Mather was present on horseback, having, perhaps, ridden down from Boston for the occasion. Calef says the spectators were so impressed with Burroughs's innocence of demeanour that Cotton Mather felt it necessary to tell them that the devil might take on the semblance of a saint or an angel; and that thereupon, the people being appeased, the executions went on. Now Calef has so often been convicted of inaccuracy that his statement here is open to suspicion. The argument that Satan might assume the appearance of some person of known innocence or excellence was a favourite one with Cotton Mather when he was inveighing against spectral evidence. As applied to the alleged testimony of the two deceased wives of Mr. Burroughs, it had a peculiarly Matherian meaning; it meant that instead of the first and second Mrs. Burroughs, it was the devil who was talking to little Ann Putnam, so that therefore the unfortunate minister was condemned upon the devil's evidence. As ordinarily understood, in the sense that Mr. Burroughs himself was an impersonation of the devil, the remark ascribed by Calef to Mather does not fit in with

Explanation of Mather's speech

[1 See Sir William Phips's report to the home government of his policy in regard to the troubles, Palfrey, iv. 112, 113.]

[2 This occupies pp. 220–291 of the London reprint of the *Wonders of the Invisible World*.]

Cases of Conscience Concerning evil SPIRITS

Personating Men, Witchcrafts, infallible Proofs of Guilt in such as are accused with that Crime.

All Considered according to the Scriptures, History, Experience, and the Judgment of many Learned men.

By Increase Mather, President of Harvard Colledge at Cambridge, and Teacher of a Church at BOSTON in New-England.

Prov. 22. 21. ---- *That thou mightest Answer the words of Truth, to them that send unto thee.*

Efficiunt Dæmones, ut quæ non sunt, sic tamen, quasi sint, conspicienda hominibus exhibeant. Lactantius Lib. 2. *Instit.* Cap. 15. *Diabolus Consulitur, cum ijs mediis utimur aliquid Cognoscendi, quæ a Diabolo sunt introducta.* Ames. *Cas. Conse.* L. 4. Cap. 23.

BOSTON Printed, and Sold by *Benjamin Harris* at the London Coffee-House. 1693.

TITLE OF INCREASE MATHER'S "CASES OF CONSCIENCE"

The Wonders of the Invisible World.

OBSERVATIONS

As well *Historical* as *Theological*, upon the NATURE, the NUMBER, and the OPERATIONS of the

DEVILS.

Accompany'd with,

I. Some Accounts of the Grievous Molestations, by DÆMONS and WITCHCRAFTS, which have lately annoy'd the Countrey; and the Trials of some eminent *Malefactors* Executed upon occasion thereof: with several Remarkable *Curiosities* therein occurring.

II. Some Counsils, Directing a due Improvement of the terrible things, lately done, by the Unusual & Amazing Range of EVIL SPIRITS, in Our Neighbourhood: & the methods to prevent the *Wrongs* which those *Evil Angels* may intend against all sorts of people among us; especially in Accusations of the Innocent.

III. Some Conjectures upon the great EVENTS, likely to befall, the WORLD in General, and NEW-ENGLAND in Particular; as also upon the Advances of the TIME, when we shall see BETTER DAYES.

IV A short Narrative of a late Outrage committed by a knot of WITCHES in *Swedeland*, very much Resembling, and so far Explaining, *That* under which our parts of *America* have laboured!

V. THE DEVIL DISCOVERED: In a Brief Discourse upon those TEMPTATIONS, which are the more Ordinary *Devices* of the Wicked One.

By Cotton Mather.

Boston, Printed by *Benj. Harris* for *Sam. Phillips.* 1693.

TITLE OF COTTON MATHER'S "THE WONDERS OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD"

his habits of expression and has no point. Apart from this misconstruction, there is nothing in the records to set off against the weighty evidence of Mather's own rules of procedure, which were in themselves the strongest condemnation the court could have had. Longfellow's picture of Mather in his tragedy of Giles Corey seems absolutely justified, except in one trifling particular, when he makes him say to Mary Walcott, "Accept an old man's blessing," which from a spruce young minister of twenty-nine is, no doubt, a slight anachronism.

The reign of terror we have been describing was the expiring paroxysm of the witchcraft delusion. In the energy of the reaction sceptics declared themselves in all quarters. How Judge Sewall, only five years afterward, got up in the Old South Church and publicly acknowledged his shame and repentance is known to every one. Not all the court were so open to conviction. Stoughton, who was at best a narrow-minded and cross-grained creature, maintained to his dying day that he had done nothing to be sorry for. Of the wretched children, one of the most active, Ann Putnam, fourteen years afterward, humbled herself before the village church at Salem and declared that she had been instrumental, with others, in bringing upon the land the guilt of innocent blood; "though what was said or done by me against any person, I can truly and uprightly say before God and man, I did it not out of any anger, malice, or ill-will to any person, for I had no such thing against one of them, but what I did was ignorantly, being deluded of Satan. And particularly as I was a chief instrument of accusing Goodwife Nurse and her two sisters, I desire to lie in the dust and to be humbled for it, in that I was a cause, with others, of so sad a calamity to them and their families." [1]

Judge Sewall's public acknowledgment of wrong

Ann Putnam's confession

I think we should accept this solemn disclaimer of malice

[1] [Nevins, *Witchcraft in Salem Village*, p. 250.]

Samuel Sewall

as sufficient evidence that in 1706 the poor girl did not believe herself to have been actuated by unworthy motives in 1692. By declaring herself to have been deluded by Satan she meant that when she accused Rebecca Nurse and George Burroughs and others she said what she believed to be true at the time, but had since learned to reject as false. In other words, when a little girl of twelve, she believed that she had

seen the ghosts of Mr. Burroughs's wives and other persons who said that they had been murdered, but as a young woman of six and twenty she looked back upon this as a delusion, and charged it to Satan. This brings us to the question, Are we justified in accepting this explanation of Ann Putnam as to her own conduct, and shall we suppose the case to have been substantially the same with the other girls? Did they really have visions of ghosts and black men and yellow birds and devil's autograph books, or was it all a lie? Did they really fall into convulsions, and fancy themselves pricked with pins, and cut and bitten, or was all that put on for effect? In his elaborate history Mr. Upham seems to incline toward the latter view. Certainly the fits came and went, and the ghost stories were told, as if to order, and certainly there was methodical co-operation of some sort, if not collusion, between most if not all the girls, and Ann Putnam's mother and the minister Parris. There can be no doubt as to such coöperation. They all worked together as harmoniously and relentlessly as the cog-wheels in a machine. Of the victims from Salem Village and the towns near by, a large majority were persons against whom either the Putnam family, or the minister, or some of the afflicted girls, are known to have entertained a grudge; others were sceptics whose scoffing remarks were liable to weaken the authority of the accusers. When we have eliminated these two classes, very few names are left. Like the tracks of various beasts which Master Reynard saw, all pointing toward the lion's cave and none coming out from it, the traces of evidence here all point in the same direction, — all point toward methodical coöperation between the accusers.

Were the accusers misled or shamming?

Evidences of collusion

The question remains, however, was this coöperation a case of conscious and deliberate conspiracy, or must we seek some other explanation? The theory of conspiracy, toward which Mr. Upham seems inclined, offers us a spectacle of astound-

ing wickedness. We are asked to believe that a minister of the gospel and a lady of high position in the community make up their minds to destroy their enemies, and for that purpose employ young girls in their families to pretend illness and bring false accusations conceived and supported with all the skill of trained actresses! Such a conspiracy is much too diabolical and altogether too elaborate for belief. Moreover, it leaves out of account the most important fact in the whole case, — the fact that the accusers, like nearly all the rest of the community, unquestionably believed in the reality of witchcraft. It will not do to invest those poor girls with a nineteenth century consciousness. The same delusion that conquered learned magistrates led them also astray. Still more, they were doubtless in a morbid mental condition. A large part of Indian medicine consists of convulsive muscular movements, twitching, capering, and groaning, accompanied by an awestruck belief in the presence of some supernatural agency. Such convulsive movements tend to prolong themselves, to recur with spasmodic violence, and they are in a high degree contagious. Abundant instances may be found among the experiences of revival meetings, where multitudes of ignorant minds are at work after much the same fashion as the Indian's, though in connection with different religious symbols. This kind of hysterical excitement selects for its victims impressionable people with sensitive nerves; it attacks children more frequently than adults, and women more frequently than men; vivacious and quickly responsive temperaments are more subject to it than those that are phlegmatic and slow. Under suitable circumstances it easily develops into a thoroughly morbid mental state, in which convulsive movements are attended by partial and temporary hallucinations; the nervous impressions become so vivid that ideas are clothed with externality and mistaken for realities. Such are the charac-

Was there a deliberate conspiracy?

Contagion of hysterical emotion

Psychology of hallucinations

teristics of hysteria and allied forms of mental disturbance, which differ from true insanity in being merely temporary and functional, and not connected with any organic lesion. They are very striking phenomena, and often very shocking, but not more mysterious than many other phases of abnormal mental life. It was not strange that an ignorant age should have called them the result of witchcraft; that same age, we must remember, regarded ordinary insanity as the direct work of the devil.

Applying these considerations to the case of the Salem girls, we may suppose that the minister's West Indian servants began by talking Indian medicine and teaching its tricks to his daughter and niece; then the girls of their acquaintance would naturally become interested, and would seek to relieve the monotony of the winter evenings by taking part in the performances. Their first motives are most likely to have been playful, but there was probably a half-shuddering sense of wickedness, a slight aroma of brimstone, about the affair, which may have made it the more attractive. I feel sure that sooner or later some of those girls would find themselves losing control over their spasms, and thus, getting more than they had bargained for, would deem themselves bewitched by Tituba and John Indian. But, especially if they found themselves taken to task by their parents, the dread of punishment — perhaps of church discipline, wherein Parris was notably severe — would be sure to make them blame the Indians in order to screen themselves. If Cotton Mather's methods had now been followed, the affair would have been hushed, and the girls isolated from each other would have been subjected to quiet and soothing treatment; and thus no doubt it would all have ended. But when Parris made the affair as public as possible, when learned doctors of divinity and medicine came and watched those girls, and declared them bewitched, what more was needed to convince their young

Playing with fire

The evils of publicity in the examinations

minds that they were really in that dreadful plight? Such a belief must of course have added to their hysterical condition. Naturally they accused Tituba, and as for the two old women, Good and Osburn, very likely some of the girls may really have been afraid of them as evil-eyed or otherwise uncanny.

For the rest of the story a guiding influence is needed, and I think we may find it in Mrs. Putnam. She was one of the Carrs of Salisbury, a family which for several generations had been known as extremely nervous and excitable. There had been cases of insanity among her near relatives. The deaths of some of her own children and of a beloved sister, with other distressing events, had clouded her mind. She had once been the most sparkling and brilliant of women, but was sinking into melancholia at the time when the first stories of witchcraft came from the parsonage and she learned that her little daughter Ann, a precocious and imaginative child, was one of the afflicted. Mrs. Putnam and her husband were both firm believers in witchcraft. I do not think it strange that her diseased mind should have conjured up horrible fancies about Goodwife Nurse, member of a family which she probably hated all the more bitterly for the high esteem in which it was generally held. Mrs. Putnam fell into violent hysterical fits like her daughter, and their bright and active servant Mercy Lewis was afflicted likewise. These three, with the minister's niece Abigail Williams and her friend Mary Walcott, were the most aggressive and driving agents in the whole tragedy. I presume Mrs. Putnam may have exercised something like what it is now fashionable to call hypnotic influence over the young girls. She honestly believed that witches were hurting them all, and she naturally suspected foes rather than friends. I see no good reason for doubting that she fully believed her own ghost stories, or that the children believed theirs. In

Explanation of Mrs. Putnam's part

She exercised hypnotic control over the children

their exalted state of mind they could not distinguish between what they really saw and what they vividly fancied. It was analogous to what often occurs in delirium.

Such an explanation of the witchcraft in Salem Village accounts for the facts much better than any such violent supposition as that of conscious conspiracy. Our fit attitude of mind toward it is pity for all concerned, yet the feelings of horror and disgust are quite legitimate, for the course of the affair was practically the same as if it had been shaped by deliberate and conscious malice. It is on the whole the most gruesome episode in American history, and it sheds back a lurid light upon the long tale of witchcraft in the past. Few instances of the delusion have attracted so much attention as this at Salem, and few have had the details so fully and minutely preserved. It was the last witch epidemic recorded in the history of fully civilized nations. It occurred among people of our own sort, and the sixth generation, born since it happened, has not yet passed away. It came just as the superstition which produced it was about to die out from the thoughts of educated men, and there is no monument more conspicuous than the Salem Witchcraft to mark the remote and fast receding side of the gulf which the human mind has traversed in these two centuries. For these reasons it looms up in our memory, and is sometimes alluded to as if it were in some way a singular or exceptional instance of superstition. Yet in Europe, only a few years earlier, the hanging of nineteen persons for witchcraft in a single village and in the course of a single summer would have called forth no special comment. The case of Salem Village may help us in the attempt to form some dim conception of the stupendous wickedness that must have been wrought by the terrible delusion in the days of its stalwart prime, when victims by the hundred were burned at the stake. We can but faintly imagine what must have been the

The case of Salem Village helps one to realize the terrors of the witchcraft delusion in the past

destruction of confidence, the breaking of the dearest ties, the madness, the reign of savage terror; and we cannot be too grateful that the gaunt spectre which stalked so long over the fairest parts of earth has at length been exorcised forever!